

Famous Artists Painting Course
Famous Artists Schools, Inc., Westport, Connecticut

Section

14

The figure in motion

Guiding Faculty

Ben Shahn

Joseph Hirsch

Doris Lee

Dong Kingman

Arnold Blanch

Adolf Dehn

Fletcher Martin

Will Barnet

Julian Levi

Syd Solomon



EL GRECO
Christ Driving the Traders from the Temple
Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees,
the National Gallery, London

The violent action of the figures in this detail from El Greco's *Christ Driving the Traders from the Temple* shows his skillful use of distortion to accentuate large movements of the body. In the bending figure, the down drag from the heavy box is emphasized by the extreme drop of the shoulders over the elongated limbs; also by the bracing of the widely spread ankles. The eye is forced to measure the power of this plunging movement by a comparison with the opposite action of the up-reaching figure. In this background figure, rib-cage and muscles are well defined without detracting from the force of the dark contours which link it with the foreground in one rhythmic sweep.



The figure in motion

The figure in motion does not mean the figure "just running." It means every human motion — it means the figure alive. It means every movement, gesture, attitude, expression and activity. It means walking, running, jumping, sitting, lifting. It means sleeping, relaxing, sneezing and sobbing. It means every known human physical activity. It means exaggeration, caricature and animation, too — the professional devices that artists employ in using the human form to communicate their ideas.

The figure by itself may be ordinary or uninteresting, but by making it "move" you bring it to life. If you can do this, you have the tools and the symbols with which to tell your story.

In drawing any action, you must first find the direction and the motive power behind it — and then devote all your attention in your drawing to expressing the action itself. In a quick sketch or even a deliberate drawing of a walking or running figure, you cannot hope to show the movement of every muscle and plane. Action is momentary, and it is important to eliminate details in your drawing just as your eye eliminates the details when watching action in real life. The movements of a figure in action become more dramatic and important than the individual elements that make up that figure — and it is only by applying selectively your knowledge of the figure and of the action of the figure that you can produce a good drawing.

In drawing the figure in motion, then, you must concentrate on drawing and establishing the action of the figure first and fill in the details afterward.

For a good example of what we mean, watch the cars flash by on a highway or the horses in a race. While you know they are cars or horses, you see only mass, movement and color — the big action itself. It is only when they have come to a halt that you can see and study the details. Similarly, in drawing the figure in motion, concentrate on simplification of the action itself. Do not allow yourself to think of the facial character, accessories or clothes — that can come later, after you have established the

action. Remember: attitude and action first — then the details.

In studying the figure in motion, your sketchbook should become your constant companion wherever you may be. In it, you should make picture notes of every figure you see — not finished drawings, but just quick sketches which may capture for you the actions of a running man, of children playing, of a housewife at work — any unusual attitude of the human figure. This is a most wonderful way to develop your powers of observation and the faculty of getting the action and spirit of your model in a few quick lines. Movement and expression are basic qualities of good pictures, and the best way to master them is to observe with your sketching as well as with your mind's eye.

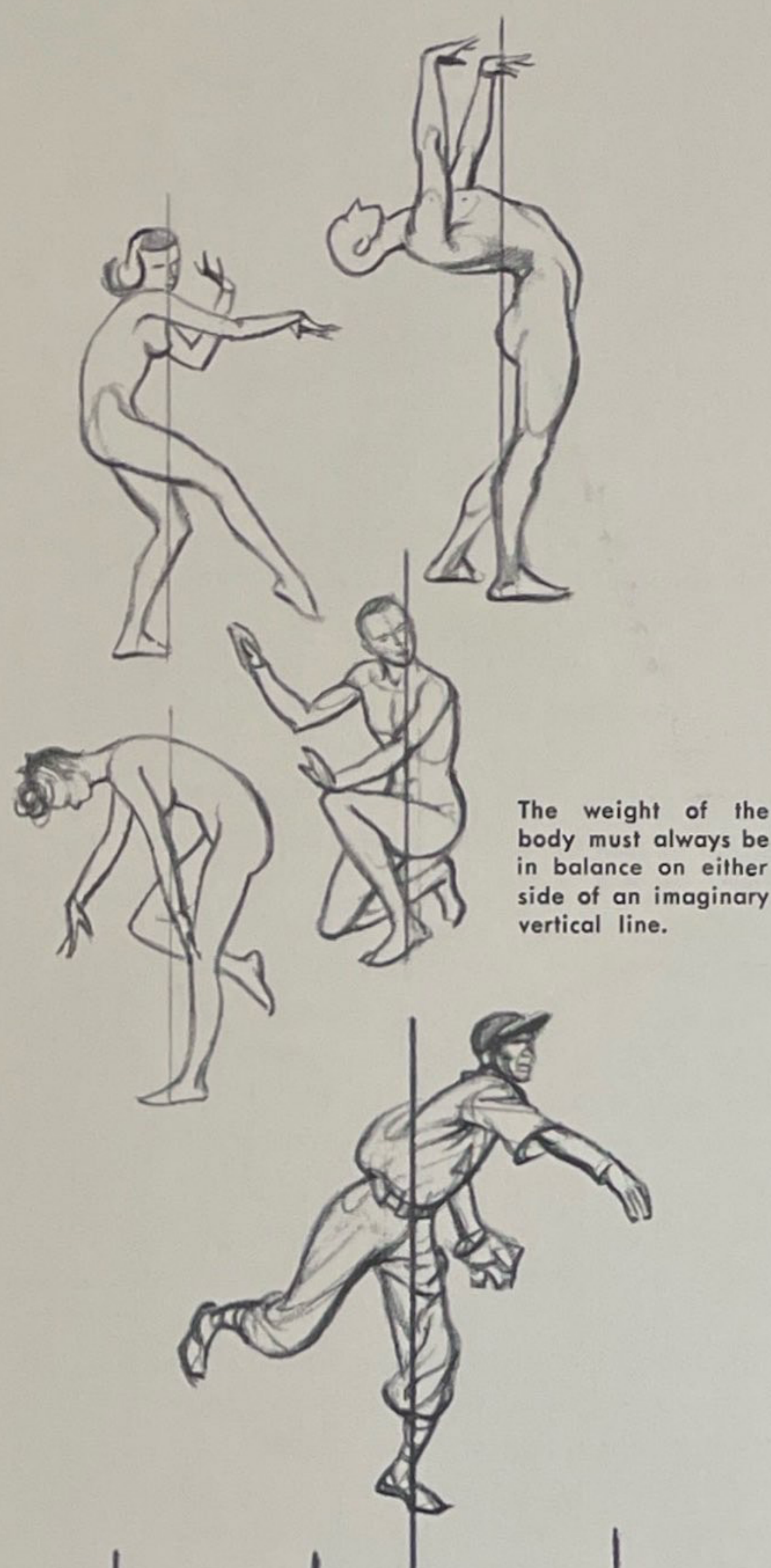
To the artist, in all the history of painting, illustration, or any fine picture making for that matter, one of the most fascinating parts of the work done by the masters has always been their sketches — the preliminary action drawings, the thumbnail sketches of details, the highly finished studies. These have always, more clearly than the finished pictures themselves, shown the effort and painstaking study and knowledge of the master artists of each generation.

Take every opportunity for "on the spot" sketching if you would become a successful artist. Make no attempt to record things in detail — the impression of the action and attitude alone is important. The policeman bawling out a motorist for passing a red light — the man asleep in the bus — the countless other human activities — these can be put down with a few pencil strokes, even on the margin of a newspaper if your sketchbook is not handy. Study action — the usual poses as well as the unusual — and make many little sketches of people in action in your everyday world. All these details and attitudes can later be worked into finished pictures.

To the artist, nothing is quite so valuable as the sketchbook crammed with moving lines and sketches, lacking perhaps in finish but full of the big qualities of picture making.



Each phase of an action has its own over-all attitude or flow of movement. In each of these photographs, study this flow of movement — the angle of the body, the position of the arms and legs. This is what counts in the action, not the anatomical details. Always look for and draw the big things first.



The weight of the body must always be in balance on either side of an imaginary vertical line.

Drawing the figure in balance

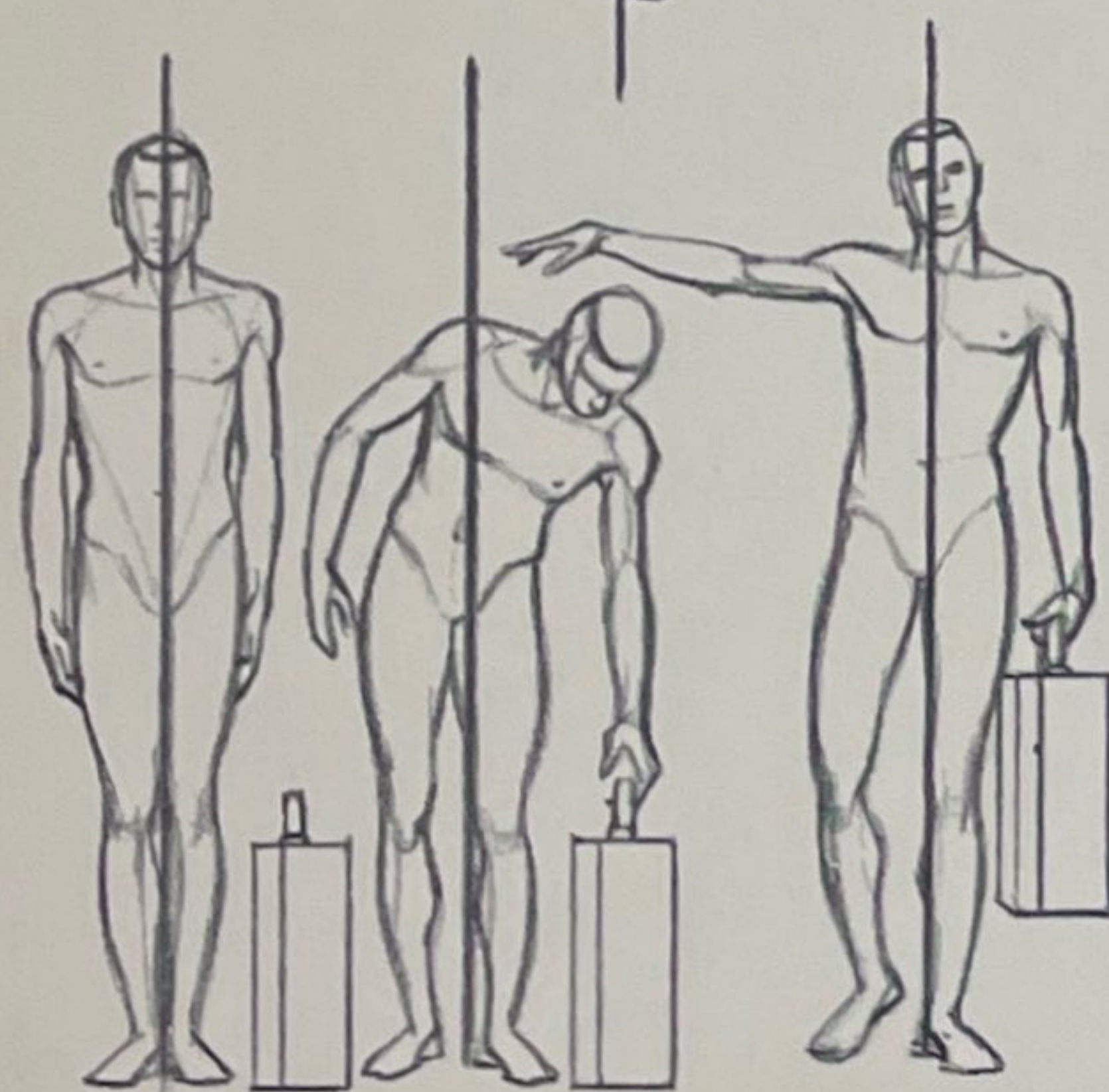
Balance is the ability of the human being to stay erect and keep from falling when in motion as well as when standing still. This balance results from the delicate distribution of his weight. When the figure is in motion the state of balance is sometimes fleeting. The artist must look for this fleeting moment and draw it, rather than choose another in which the figure appears unstable and out of balance. Pictures in which the figures are out of balance are always disturbing and unconvincing.

As an aid to drawing figures in proper balance, start your drawing with a light vertical line as a guide for placing the various parts of the figure in the proper position. This line is just as useful when drawing the figure in attitudes of running, walking, bending, crouching, etc.

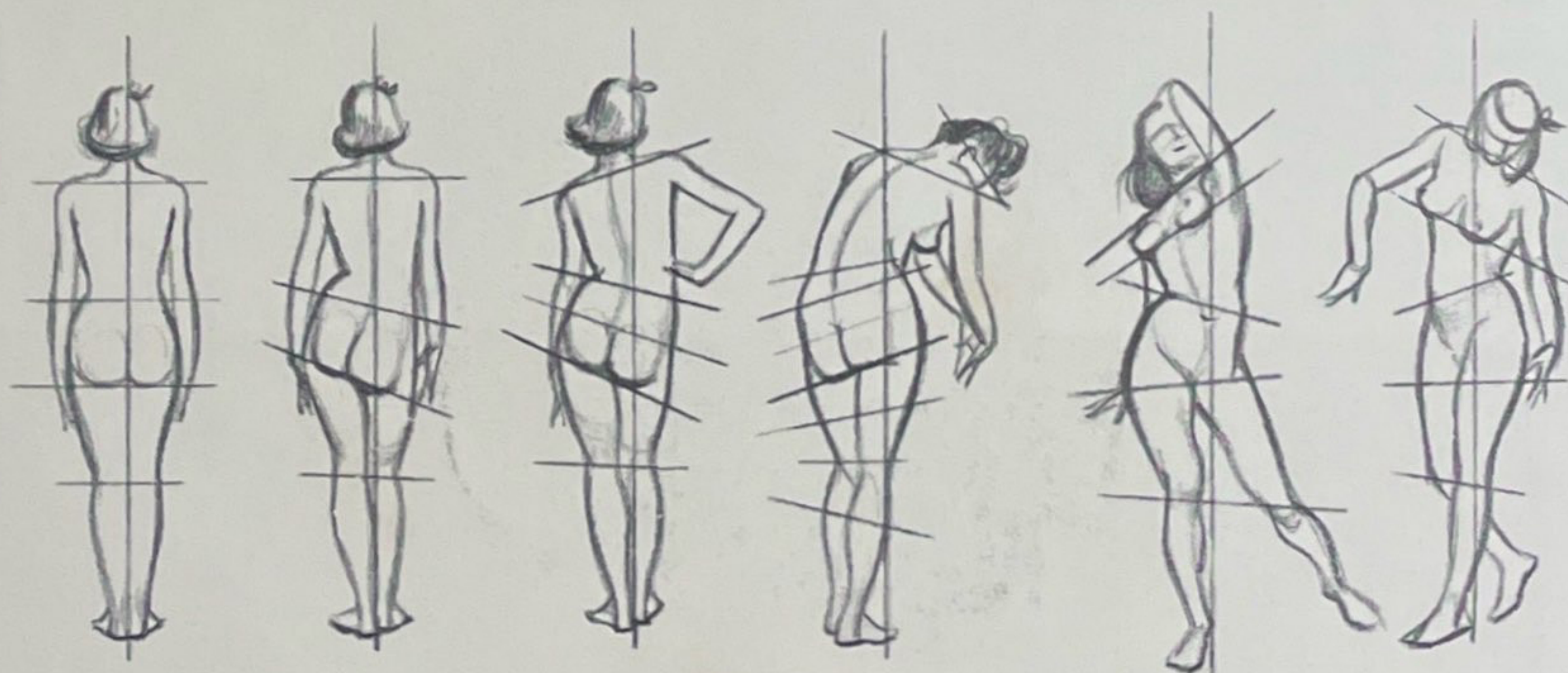
When you draw the figure in any position, establish the position of both left and right parts at the same time. For example, draw both shoulders at the same time; do the same with the hips and knees. In the female figure, establish the position of both breasts at the same time. You cannot ignore one side of the figure while you draw the other side and still produce a balanced action.

When the figure is standing erect, its weight is distributed equally on either side of a vertical line which passes from the pit of the neck to the middle of the instep of the foot which supports the body. Any motion of the body or change from this first position will automatically displace the pit of the neck from this vertical line, so you must remember that the weight of the body must always be balanced over the foot or feet or between the feet that rest on the ground and support this weight.

In bending to one side, as in the action of lifting a heavy suitcase or reaching, you will find that you naturally extend your opposite arm to preserve your balance — and you will usually raise the heel of the opposite foot from the ground as well. This shows that you must place a sufficient weight on the opposite side to preserve your balance — this applies to every attitude and action. In bending, the body lengthens on one side as much as it shortens on the other — but the length of the central line does not change.



In drawing the figure, remember that these vertical lines are only imaginary. When sketching in a figure, the line should be sketched in very lightly. This also applies to all other guide lines.

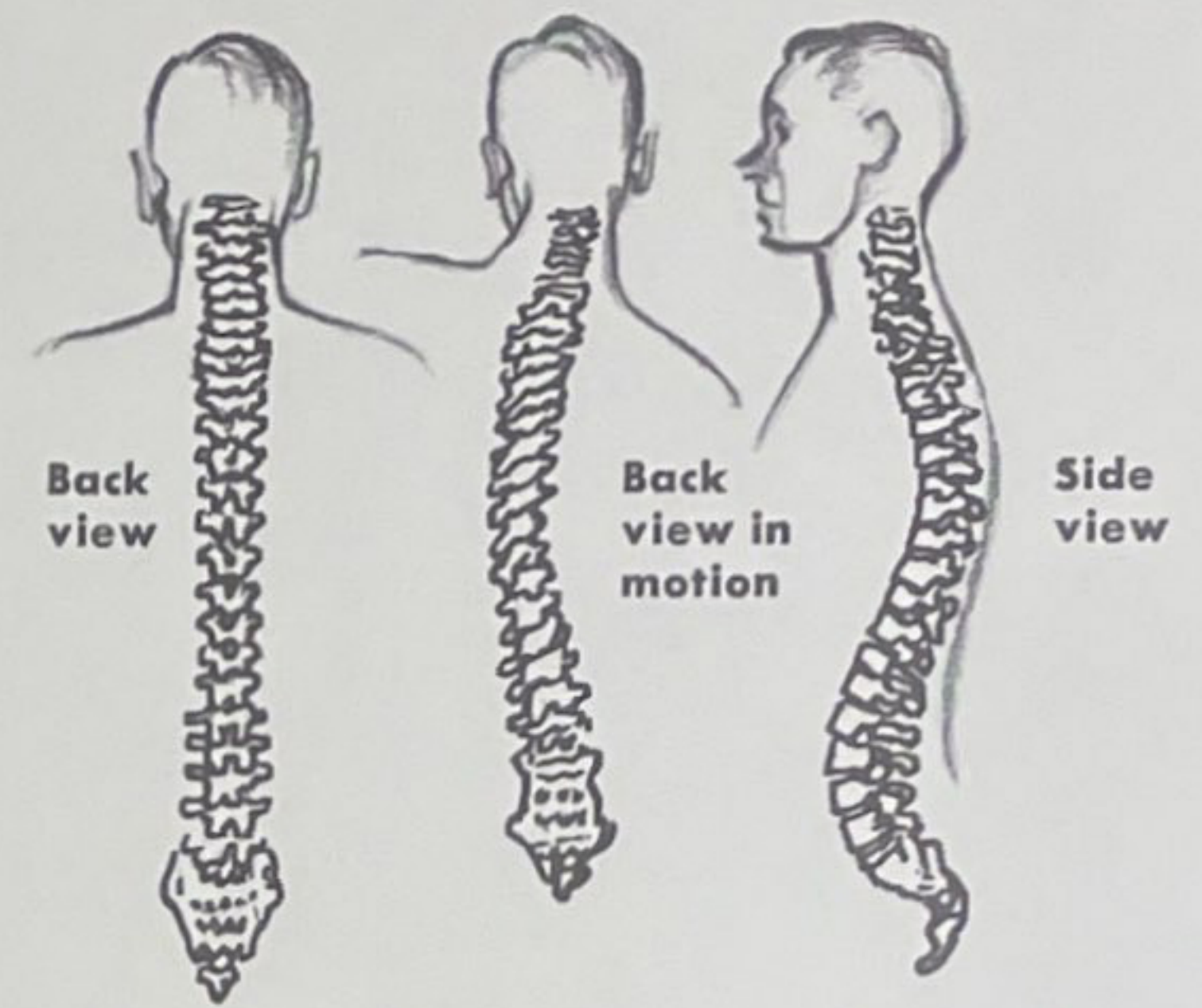


The shift of weight to one foot causes the other leg to relax, with a dropping down of the hip and an effect of stretch on that side. On the side to which the weight has been shifted, the hip has been pushed up and the side folded and shortened, with this movement causing a bend in the body, indicated partly by the position of the spinal column and also resulting in a definite change in the direction of the shoulders.

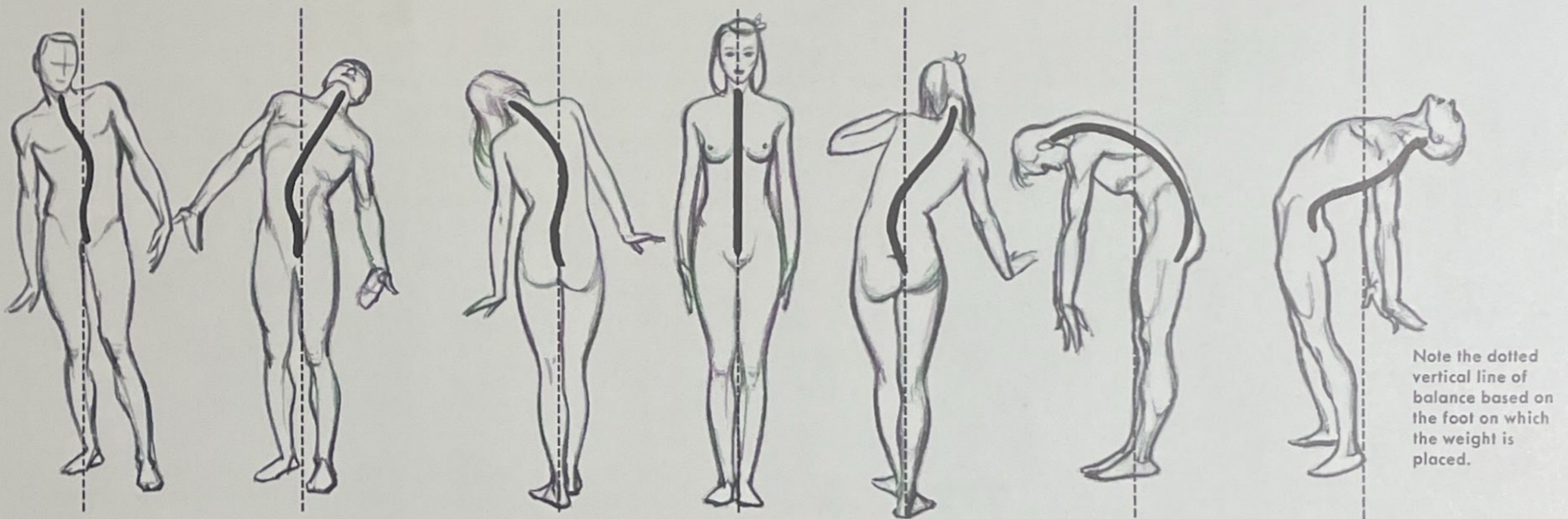
The spine and body move together

For the action of the body, look for and study the curve of the spinal column. The slant of the shoulders, the hips, the rotation and turning of the body are due to the twisting of the vertebrae which make up the spinal column. Each vertebra of the spine moves a little and the whole movement in the entire spinal column is the result of all these many little movements. Always think of the spinal column as the connecting rod between the upper and lower portions of the torso — as well as the head, which, of course, is at the upper tip of the spine.

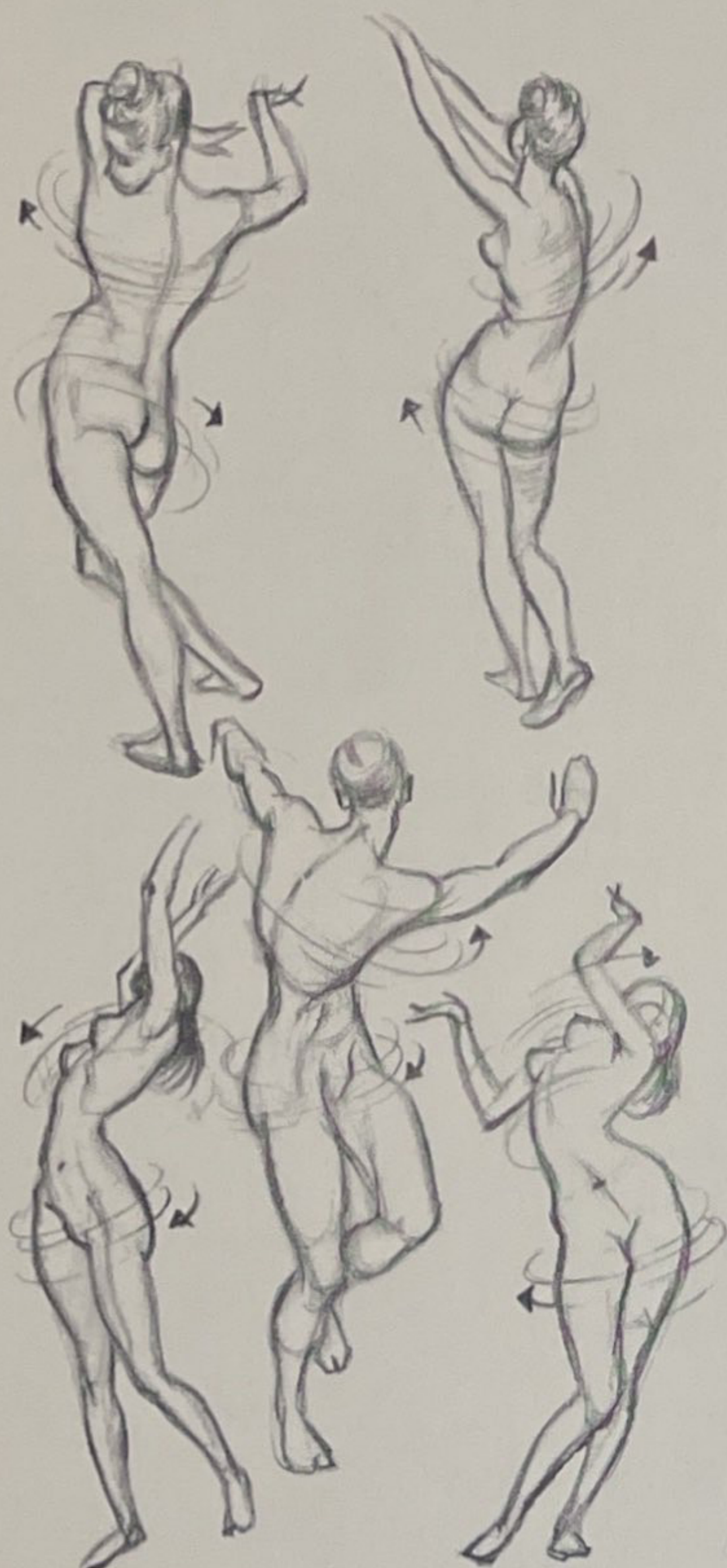
If you thoroughly learn the function and movement of the spinal column, it will add greatly to your ability in drawing the figure in action from every angle.



The spinal column is made up of many vertebrae, each of which moves a little, making up the movement of the spine.



In drawing the figure in action, concentrate on establishing the action first. Fill in details later.



Twisting and turning

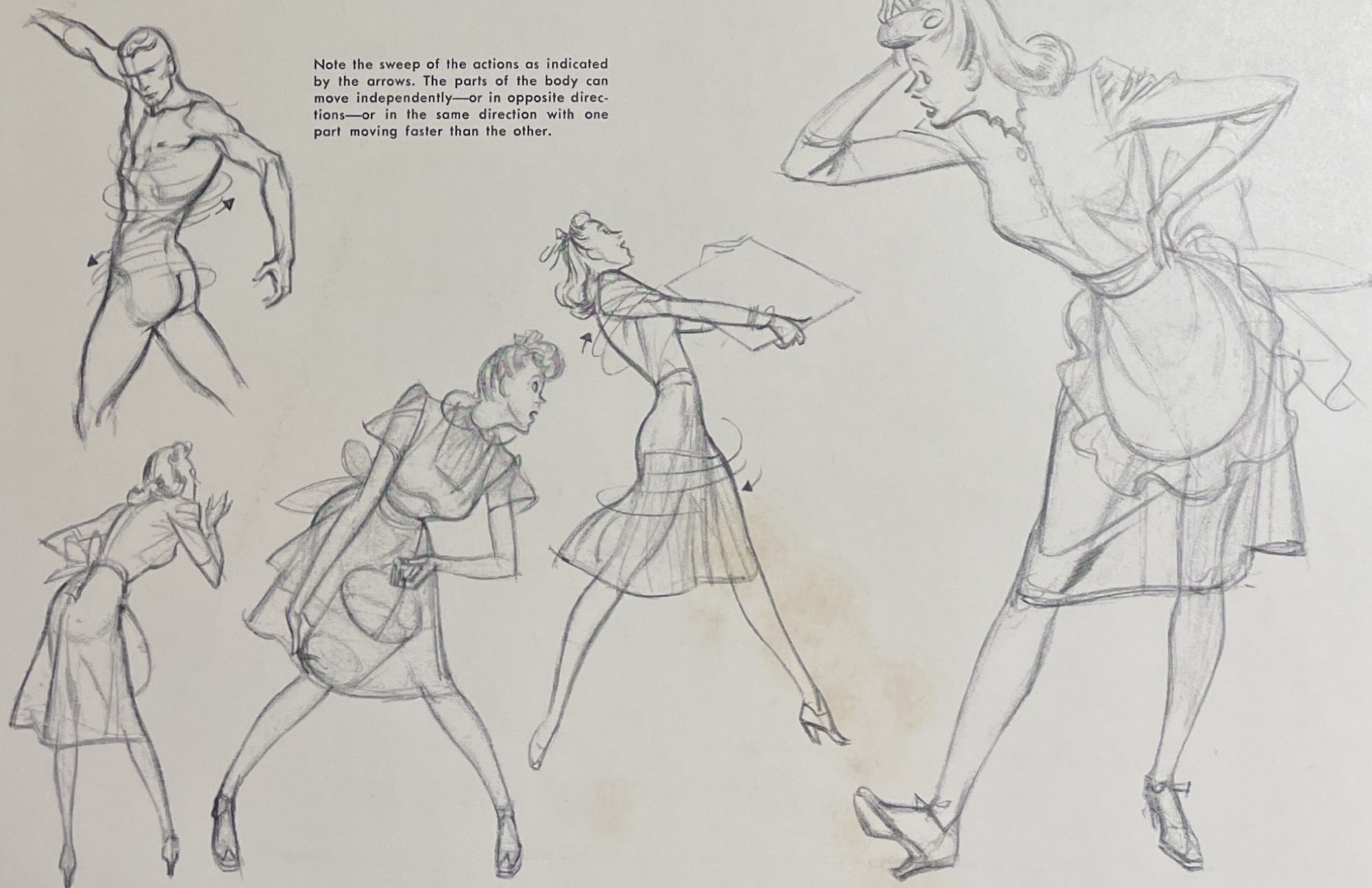
In drawing the human figure twisting and turning, you must consider it in its masses. These masses—the head, chest and pelvis—are held together in their different movements by the spinal column.

As these masses twist and turn, their relative positions change. You might think of these movements pretty much like those of an accordion being played. One side is the active side. On this side the forms are forced toward each other, and are compressed and brought together much like the pleats of an accordion. The opposite and “inflated” side shows the longer, sweeping curves.

You must capture a definite feeling of movement in every pose. The cartoonist adds greatly to the sense of movement of his figures by drawing direction or speed lines back of a moving hand or foot, but you must show this movement in the figure itself.

To create a convincing effect of a figure turning and twisting, it is important to “feel” the full range of the movement as you draw. The viewer must be made to sense the movement that is in progress. In this kind of drawing, your best approach is to watch people in action and observe their gestures. You must make quick mental notes and then record them with a pencil, trying to capture on paper just those lines and forms involved in the motion or gesture. With your earlier studies of anatomy and the figure thoroughly absorbed, you should find that you are now able to make these action drawings convincing and real. Here, as we have said before, lies the great value of your pocket sketchbook—and our slogan: See—Observe—Remember.

Note the sweep of the actions as indicated by the arrows. The parts of the body can move independently—or in opposite directions—or in the same direction with one part moving faster than the other.



Foreshortening

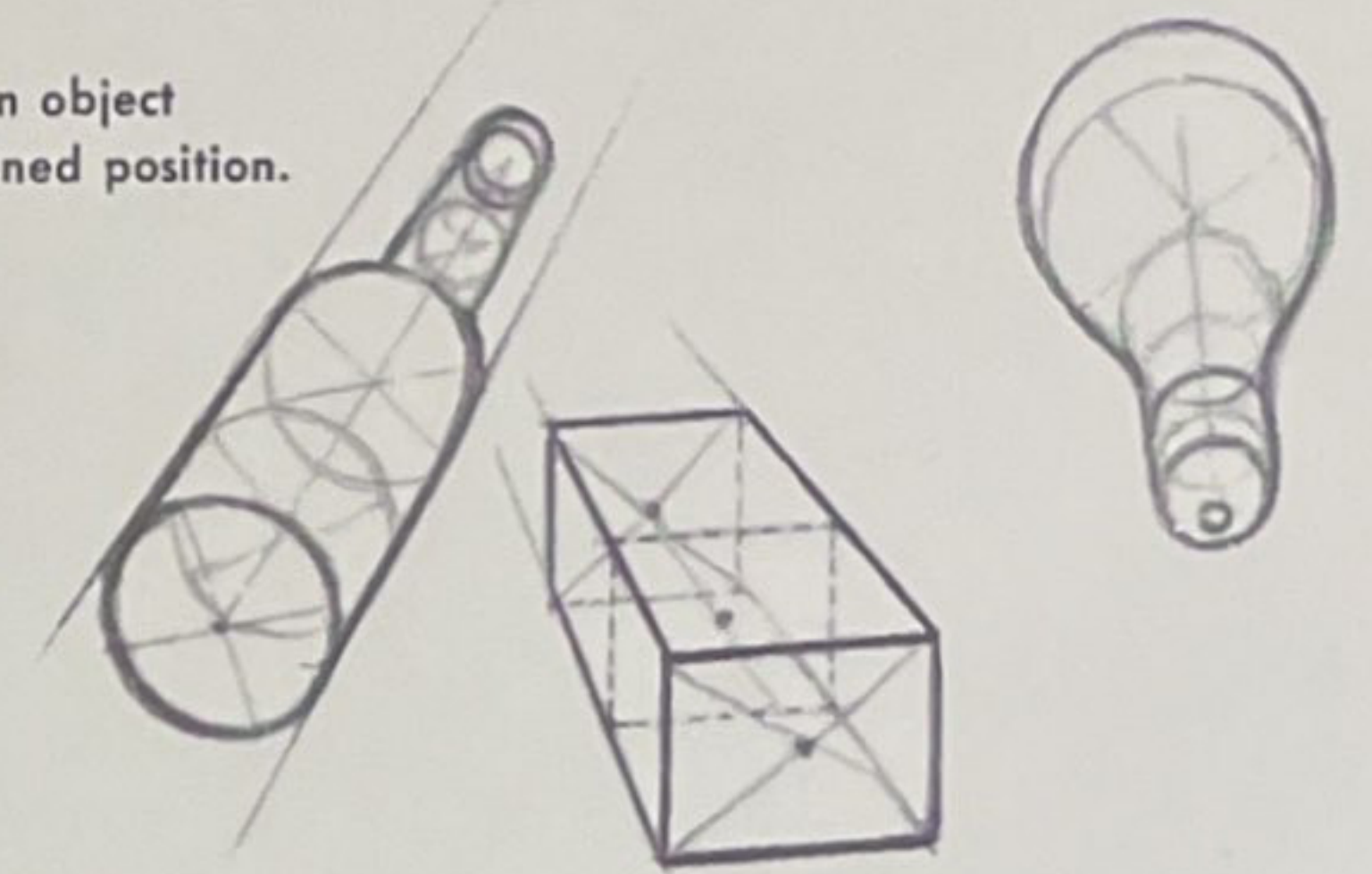
When we draw the figure in motion, foreshortening and perspective should be considered together. Foreshortening, as it is known to artists, is the use of perspective in drawing a figure so that the parts nearest us are made to appear larger in proportion to those farther away.

In drawing the figure in outline with no shading, foreshortening requires extra care to represent the parts in true perspective. If the human figure were composed of straight lines and angles, we might draw it by the general rules of perspective, but it is made up of many curves flowing into one another. Practice and study become necessary to learn how to make a foreshortened or perspective drawing of a human figure lying down with either the head or feet toward the artist, an arm and hand reaching out directly at you, or in many similar attitudes.

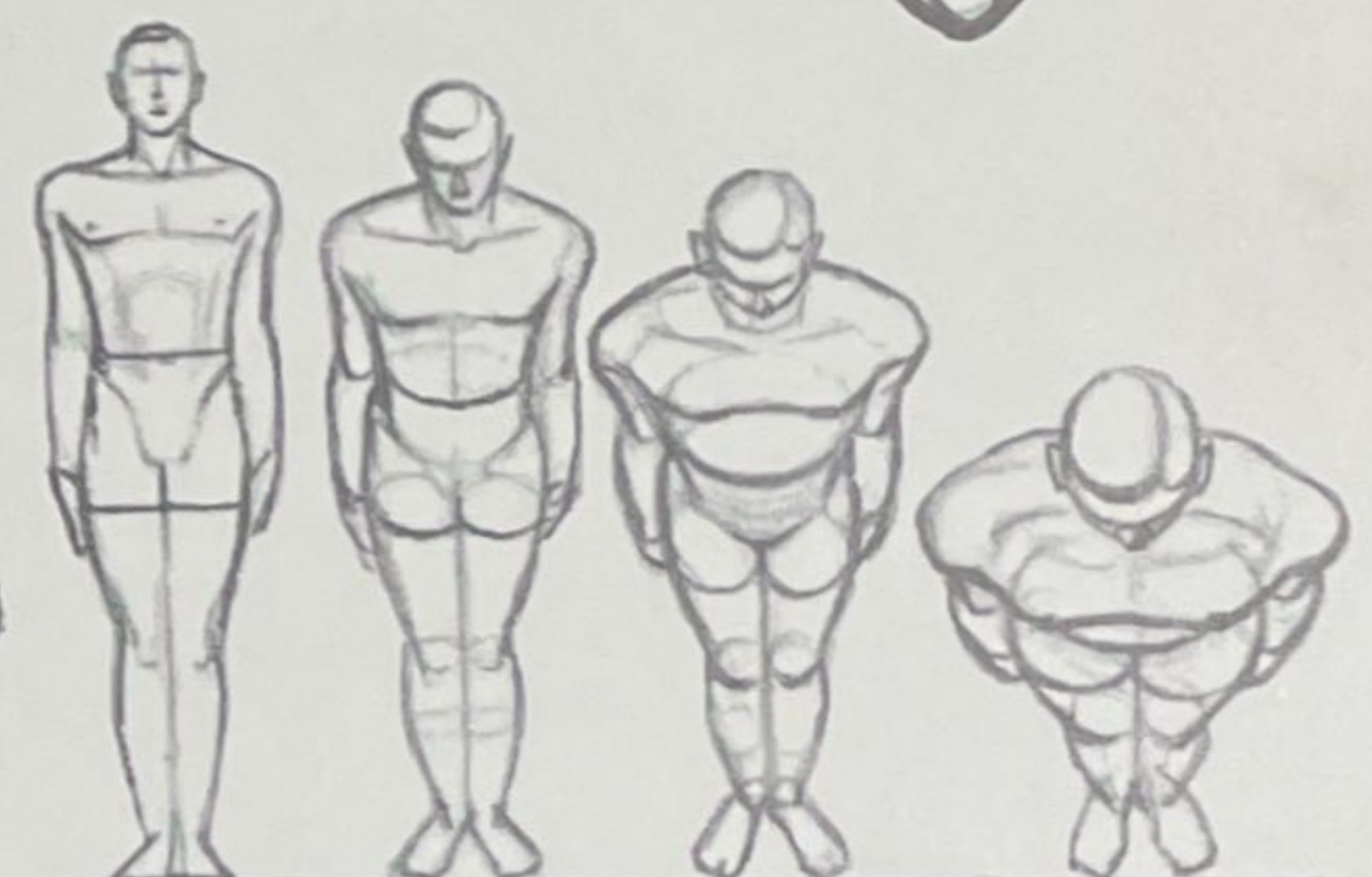
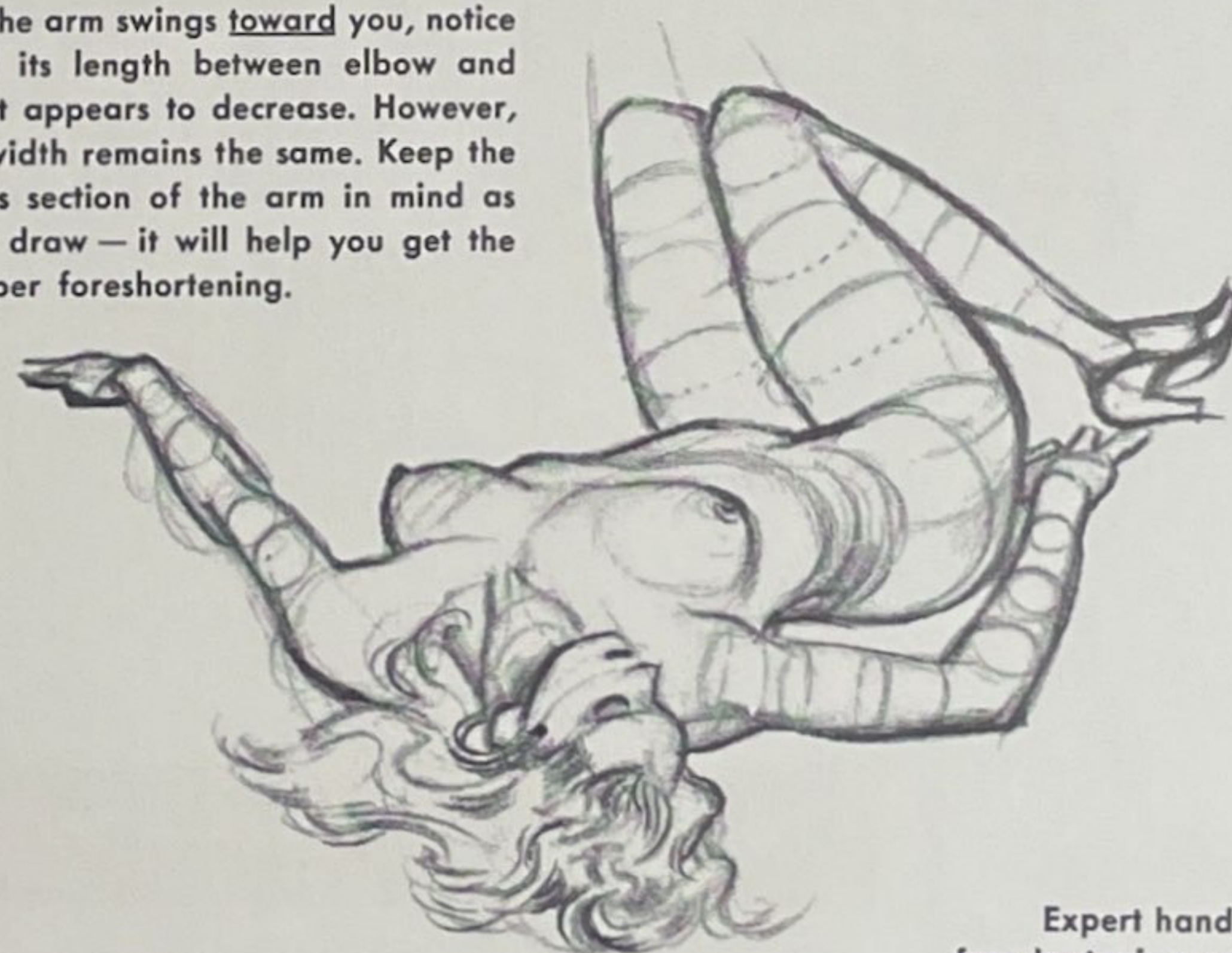
The best way to make a convincing drawing of a figure in a foreshortened position is to study what you see very carefully. Remember that in foreshortened positions rules of figure proportion do not apply as they do to a normal straight-on view of the standing figure. When you foreshorten arms or legs, pay close attention to their width. The length of the part you foreshorten will be much reduced, but the width should be normal. The head measurement cannot be used. Instead, you should rely on your eye more than ever. Compare the size of one mass of the body to another. Note that certain parts may not be visible because they are hidden by others. Rely on your eye and trust it when drawing the foreshortened figure.

If you were directly in front of a figure standing at attention, no foreshortening would be needed. But if you were above the figure or below it, you would have to foreshorten. Practically every drawing of the human figure — especially when it is in motion — involves some problem of foreshortening.

Think of the cross section of an object as you draw it in a foreshortened position.



As the arm swings toward you, notice that its length between elbow and wrist appears to decrease. However, its width remains the same. Keep the cross section of the arm in mind as you draw — it will help you get the proper foreshortening.



If a man fell forward toward you, this is what you would see as his head and shoulders came closer than the rest of his body and limbs.



Imaginary circles of different degree show how the form and perspective are retained in the figure and limbs whether coming directly at you or going away. Note the feeling of solidity and roundness when the figure is foreshortened expertly.

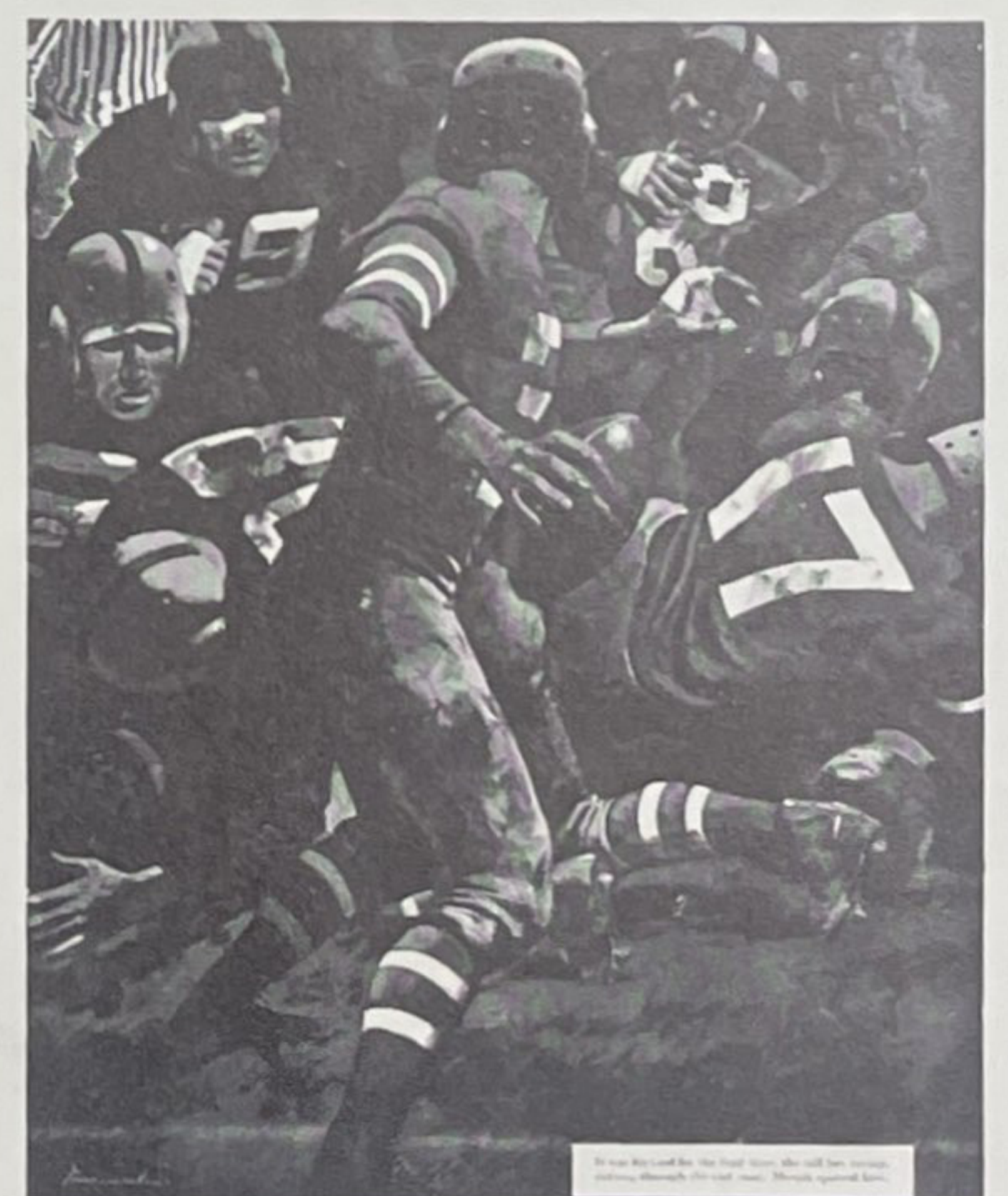
Expert handling of foreshortening problems



AL PARKER
© The Curtis Publishing Co.



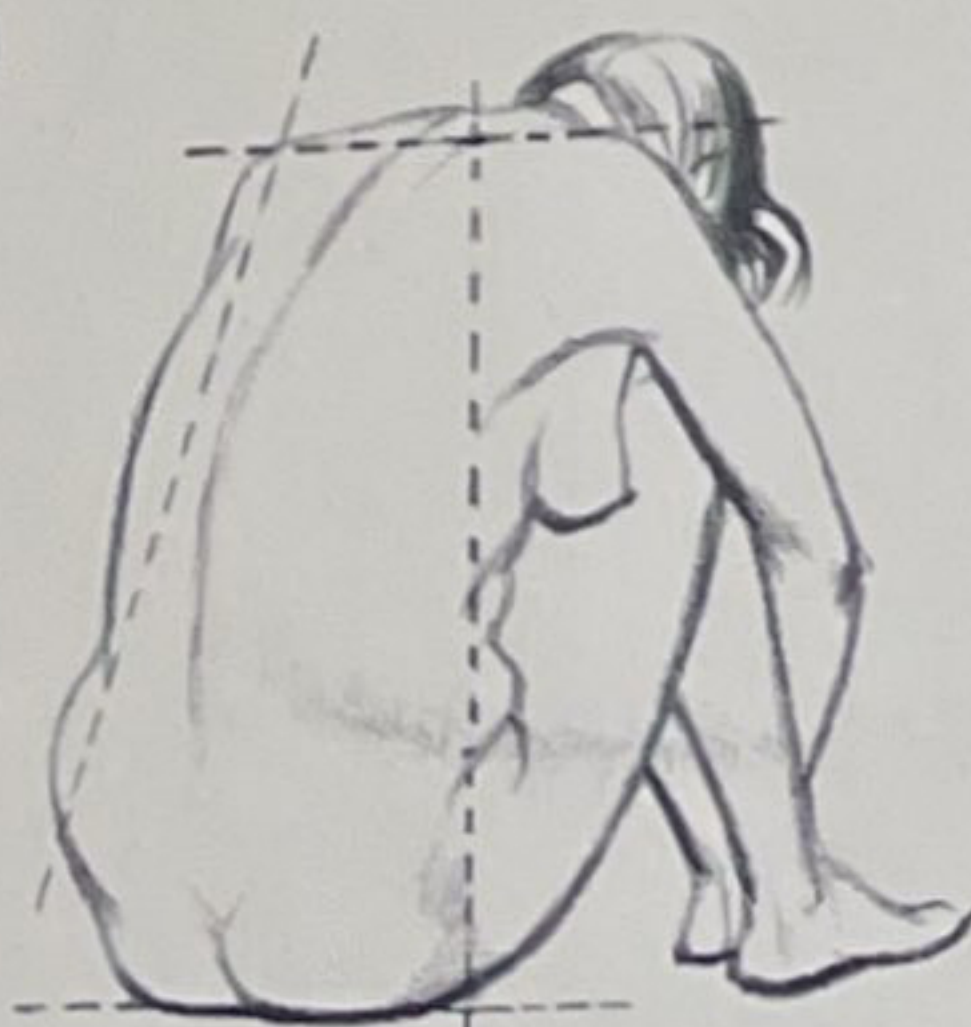
AUSTIN BRIGGS
© The Curtis Publishing Co.



FRED LUDEKENS
© The Curtis Publishing Co.



In drawing the figure, the points defining the proportions as well as the direction of the shoulders and limbs should be carefully marked — first.



Sitting — bending — kneeling

Nothing is quite so uninteresting as a figure “just sitting” — feet close together, the arms resting alike on the arms of the chair and the face looking straight ahead. To be interesting, the seated figure must suggest a mood and attitude, whether relaxed or alert.

The seated figure can express a wide variety of attitudes; it can suggest fatigue, dejection, aggressiveness, aloofness, boredom, tension. Each attitude must be studied and drawn differently. Sit down in front of a mirror and act out the different positions and emotions. See how simple it is to dramatize them all. If possible, get someone to act these emotions out for you while you sketch them.

In drawing the seated figure, it is important to understand how the weight is supported by the thighs and buttocks, the back, hands and elbows. Both the thighs and buttocks flatten considerably, especially in the female. Care must be taken to draw the head in the proper position over the body, since it has a great deal to do with completing the attitude as well as telling the story you are trying to picture. Remember that while the seated figure is usually supported and is not so obviously subject to the laws of gravity as is the upright figure, your central line of balance and distribution of the weight is just as important. This must be considered thoroughly or, as in the case of the upright figure, your seated figure will not be convincing.

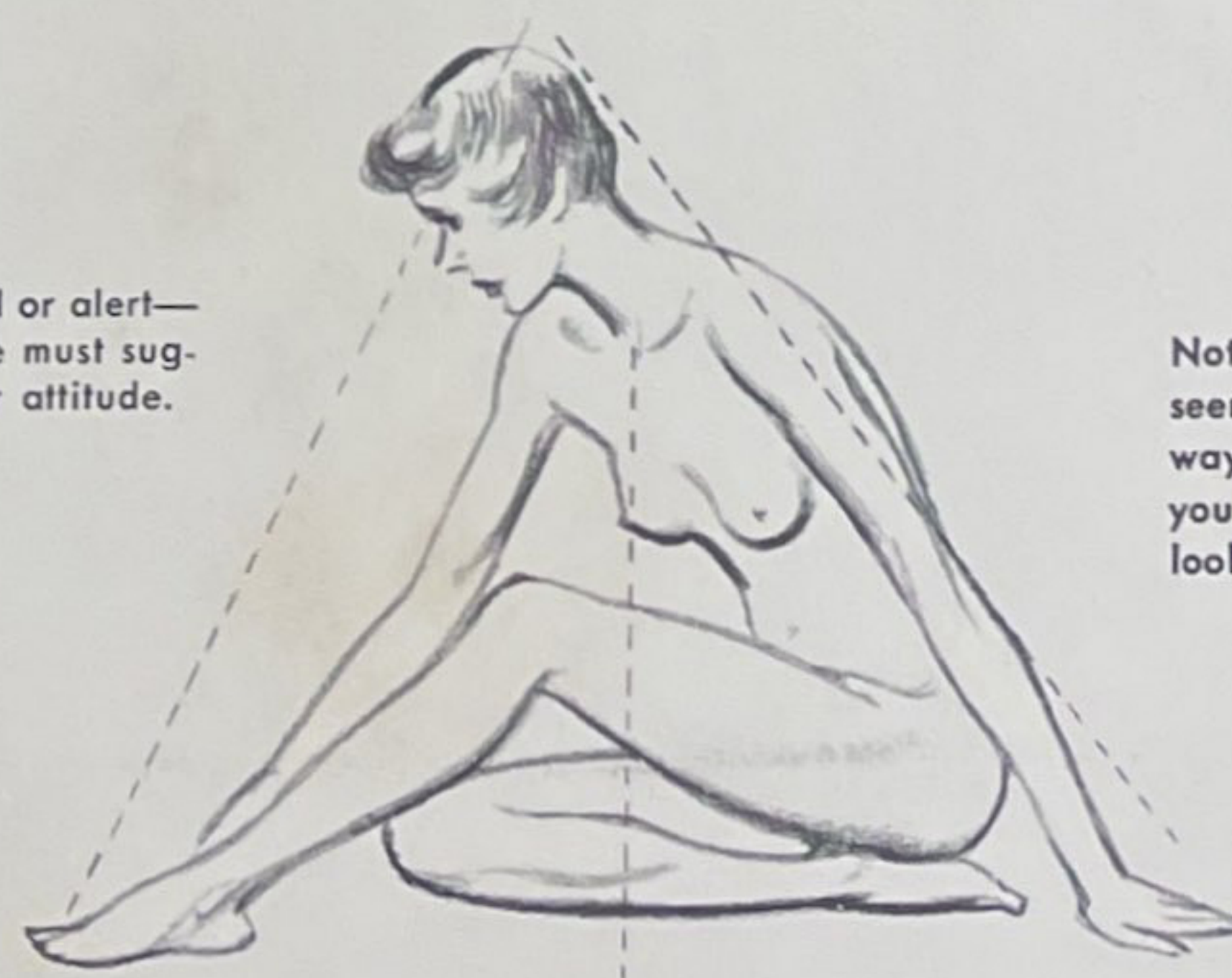
Care must be taken, in drawing sitting postures, to think out the perspective and foreshortening. Study carefully the forms of the body as they either recede from or come toward you. The attention we gave to form in the previous sections should prove its value here. Study carefully the contours arranged in front of each other. If you don't, an arm will look short or a thigh will not recede properly and the legs will fail to look right in perspective.

In drawing a bending, kneeling or other action, the same rule of interest described above must always apply. “Just bending” is dull and uninteresting; the body must have balance, rhythm, and purpose. There must be a reason for bending or kneeling — for that matter, every movement of the human form is motivated by a specific reason.

Study the drawings on these pages, paying special attention to the points of strain as well as the degree of movement of the parts of the body in the actions. Make many sketches of yourself, members of your family and friends in these various poses. Work for the actions rather than the details — always keeping in mind the imaginary line of balance.

You learn to draw — by drawing

Whether relaxed or alert — the seated figure must suggest a mood or attitude.



Note that all the figures on this page seem to be in balance. This must always be your watchword in laying in your sketch. Train yourself to always look for the line of balance.



A complete stride performed at a normal walking pace. Study the position of the arms in relation to the legs at every position, as the walker proceeds across the page.

Walking and running

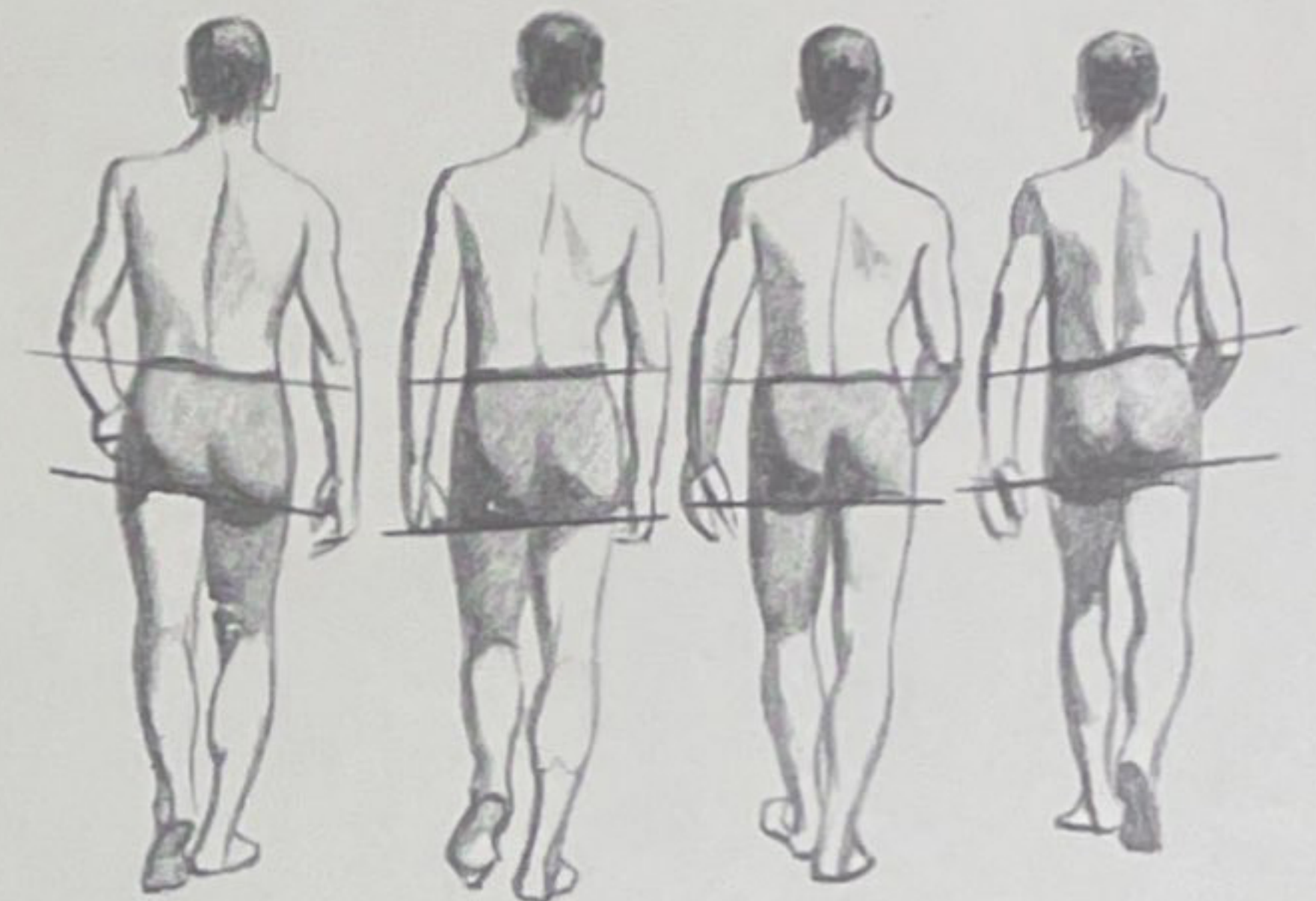
In walking, the body alternately shifts its weight first to one leg and then to the other, with the center of balance over the foot on the ground. The leg is extended slightly in advance of the body — the heel touches the ground first, quickly followed by the toes. With this forward foot resting on the ground, the heel of the other foot is raised, with the knee bending slightly as the leg swings forward past the other. As this leg swings forward, the foot of the other leg bears the whole weight of the body. As the leg swings forward to rest on the ground it takes its turn at supporting the weight of the body. During this process the body is always passing vertically over the supporting foot.

Each time that the foot is raised it thrusts the weight of the body to the side over the other foot as well as forward. The unconscious effort to balance the movement of the limbs in walking causes the arms to swing alternately in opposite directions to the legs so that when the right leg swings forward the right arm swings back — with the reverse action applying to the other two limbs.

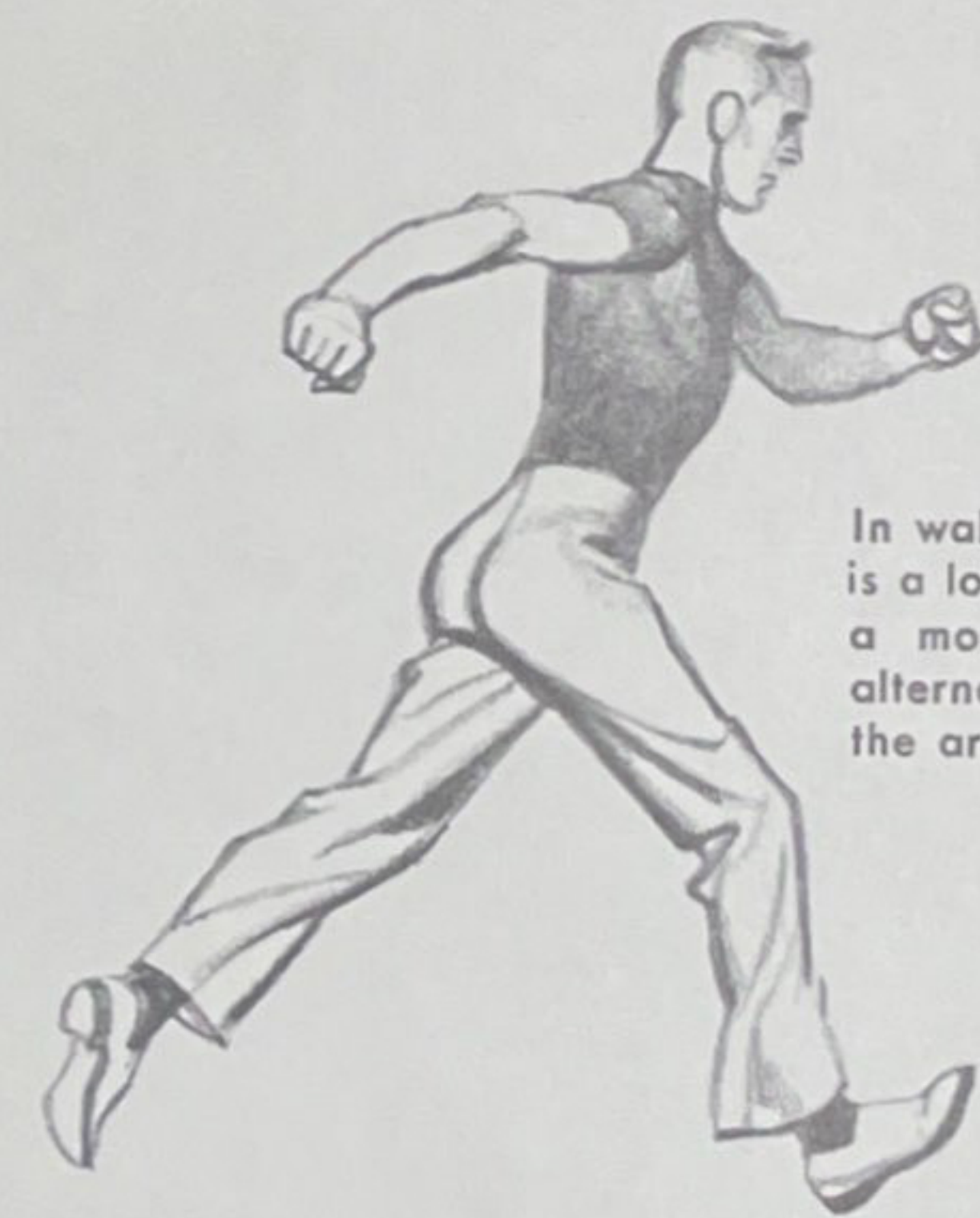
A longer stride, accompanied by a more pronounced alternate swinging of the arms, distinguishes a fast walk from an ordinary normal walk. When you draw either of these actions, remember to show that the knees are bent, to avoid an appearance of stiffness.

When running, the body should always be shown ahead of the center of gravity. The faster the figure runs, the more it should appear to lean forward.

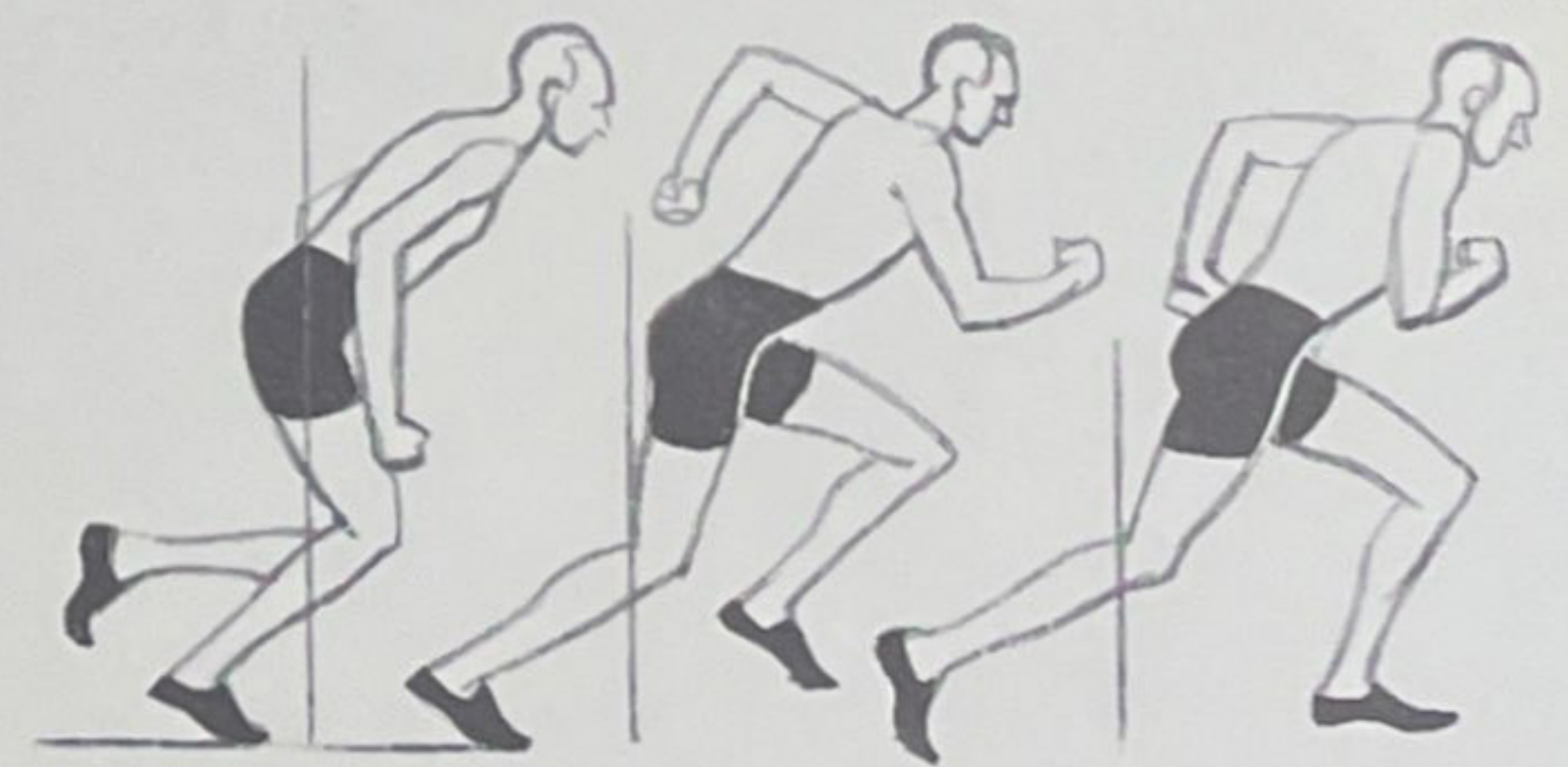
Some of the most important views of the figure in motion show it in the act of walking. Study these actions thoroughly in the people around you — make many sketches of them. Unless these fundamental actions are carefully observed and correctly drawn, they will never look right.



Note the direction and movement of the hips and buttocks as the weight shifts from one foot to the other in a normal stride.



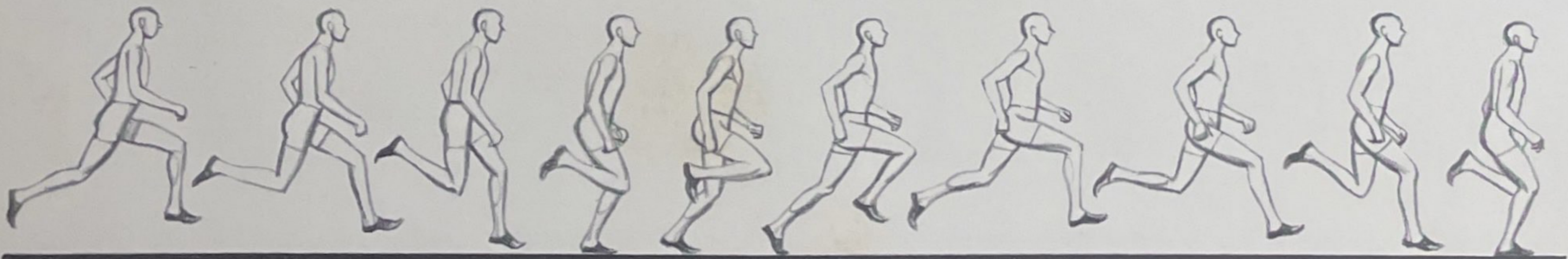
In walking fast, there is a longer stride and a more pronounced alternate swing of the arms.



The faster the running position, the farther forward the body is thrust in front of the imaginary line of balance.

Carry your sketchbook — use it!

The smooth running stride of an athlete—note the apparent "feeling" of balance in every stage of the running action.





MICHELANGELO. Archers Shooting

This page of sketches demonstrates clearly why Michelangelo is considered one of the greatest masters of figure drawing. The artist's authority stems partly from his detailed knowledge of anatomy, but even more from his penetrating observation of action. Here he has captured the gesture of shooting so perfectly that the archers seem to fly after the departing arrows.

Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art



DAUMIER. A Clown

Here Daumier has drawn action as we see it, rather than as we think we see it. There is no detail, no freezing of the forms within hard edges. The excited gesticulation of the clown, the wild beating of the drum, are suggested by nervous draftsmanship in a kind of multiple-image technique related to Futurism and the modern stroboscopic camera.



GOYA. The Duel

With a few strokes of the brush Goya has stated this action as convincingly as it could be shown in a finished painting. Study the buttressed power of the figure at the left as compared with the yielding, relaxed figure at the right, caught in the instant before collapse.



JOHN ATHERTON. Nude

Atherton's primary interest as a designer shows up in the pose he chose for this drawing. He is more concerned with the rhythmic relationship of parts than with figure structure, but of course sound anatomical knowledge is required to draw in this manner.

Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art



MICHELANGELO. Adam

Michelangelo's work provides a classic example of beautiful balance between anatomical drawing and simplification of the figure form. His figures are given magnificent muscular structure for expressive purposes, to convey the idea of power and strength. At the same time the anatomical detail is not permitted to destroy the over-all unity and simplicity of the figure as an organic unit.



Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

AUGUSTUS JOHN. Nude Study

This little sketch by a great contemporary draftsman shows how simply and convincingly the figure in action can be presented, if you have a specific knowledge of how shoulders, hips, and torso work together under these conditions.

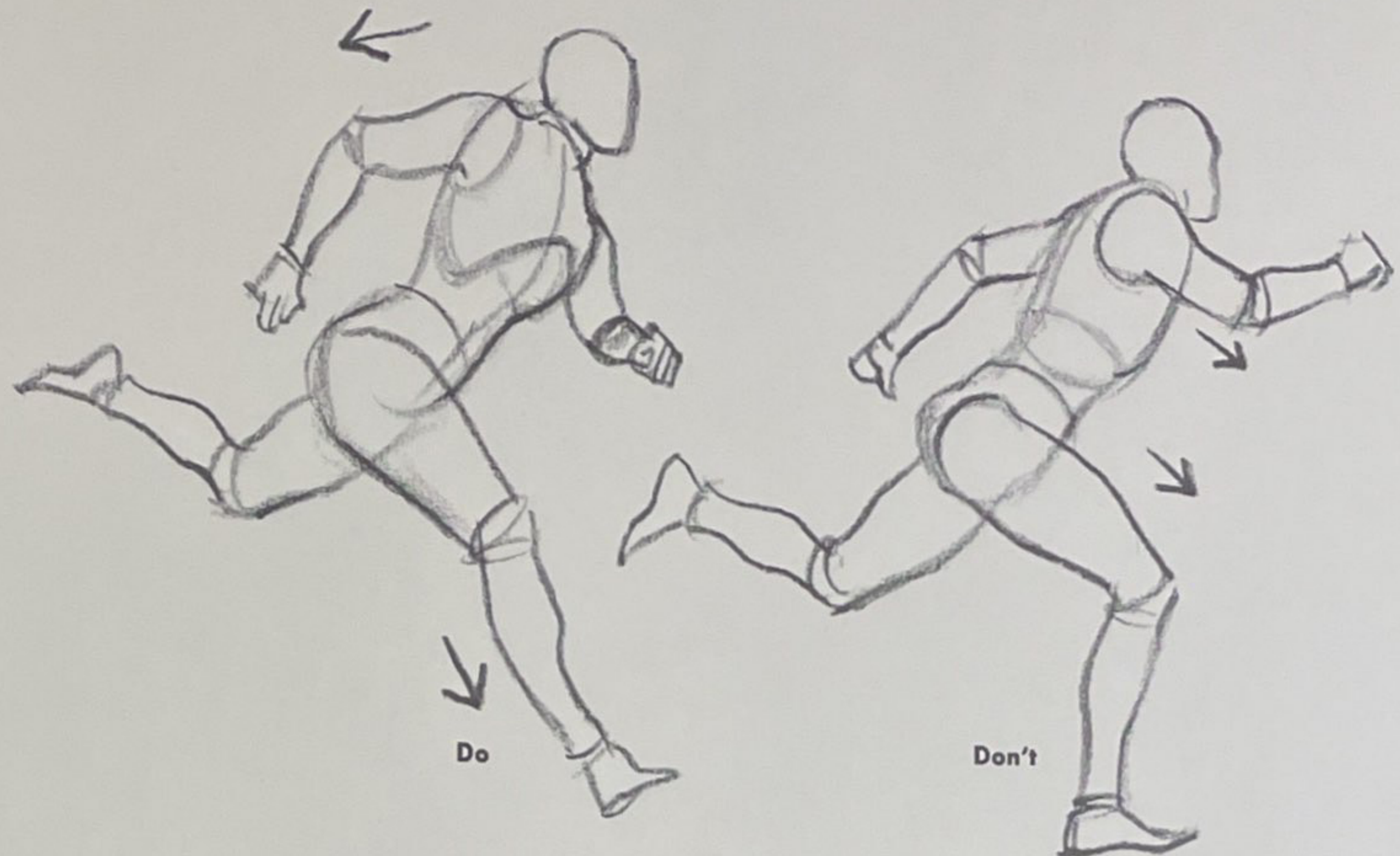


BOUCHER. Nude

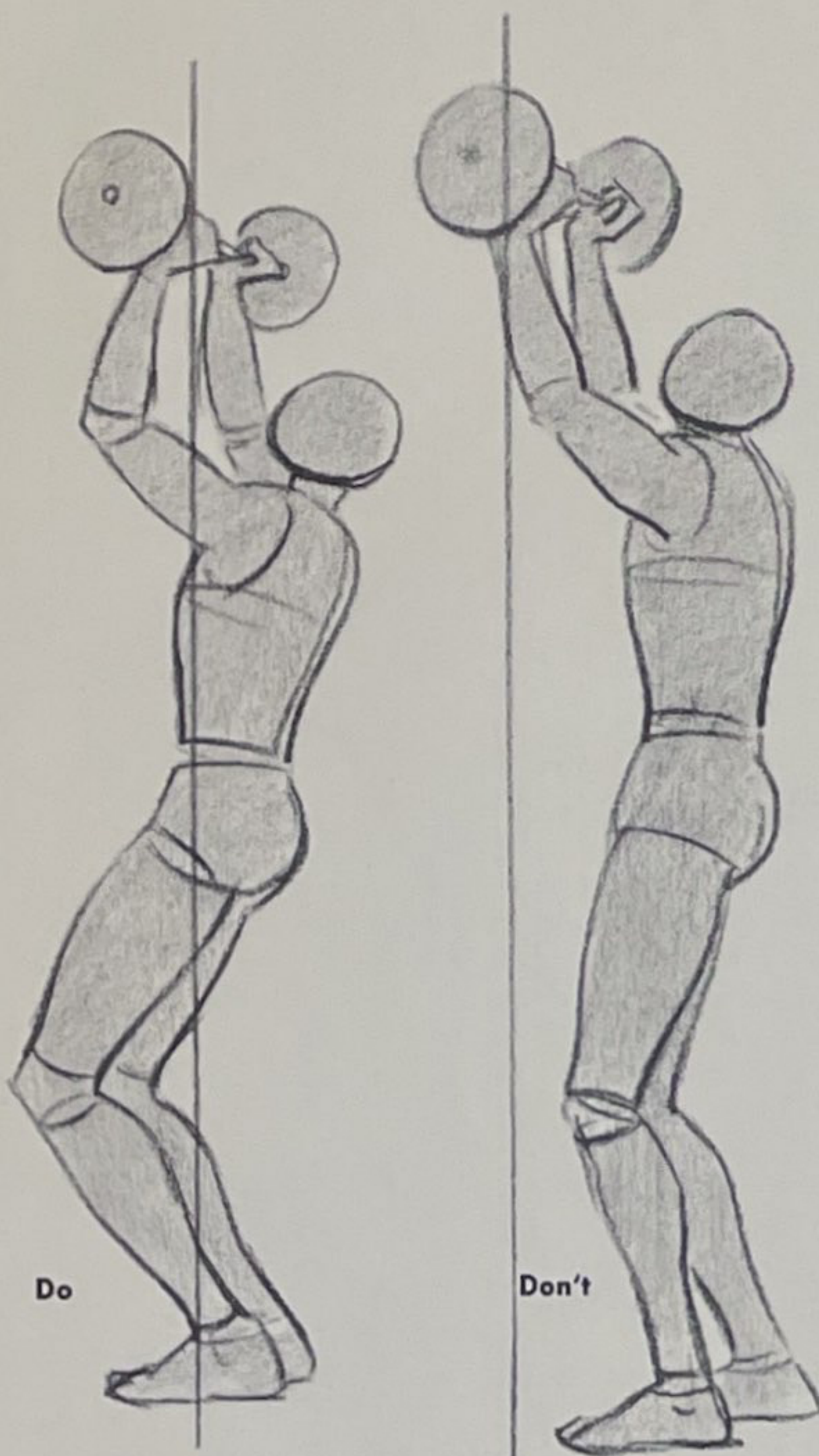
The problems of foreshortening involved in drawing this lovely pose might have discouraged an artist with less mastery of anatomy. Notice how the graceful and varying contours of the figure result directly from the underlying muscular structure.

Do's and don'ts

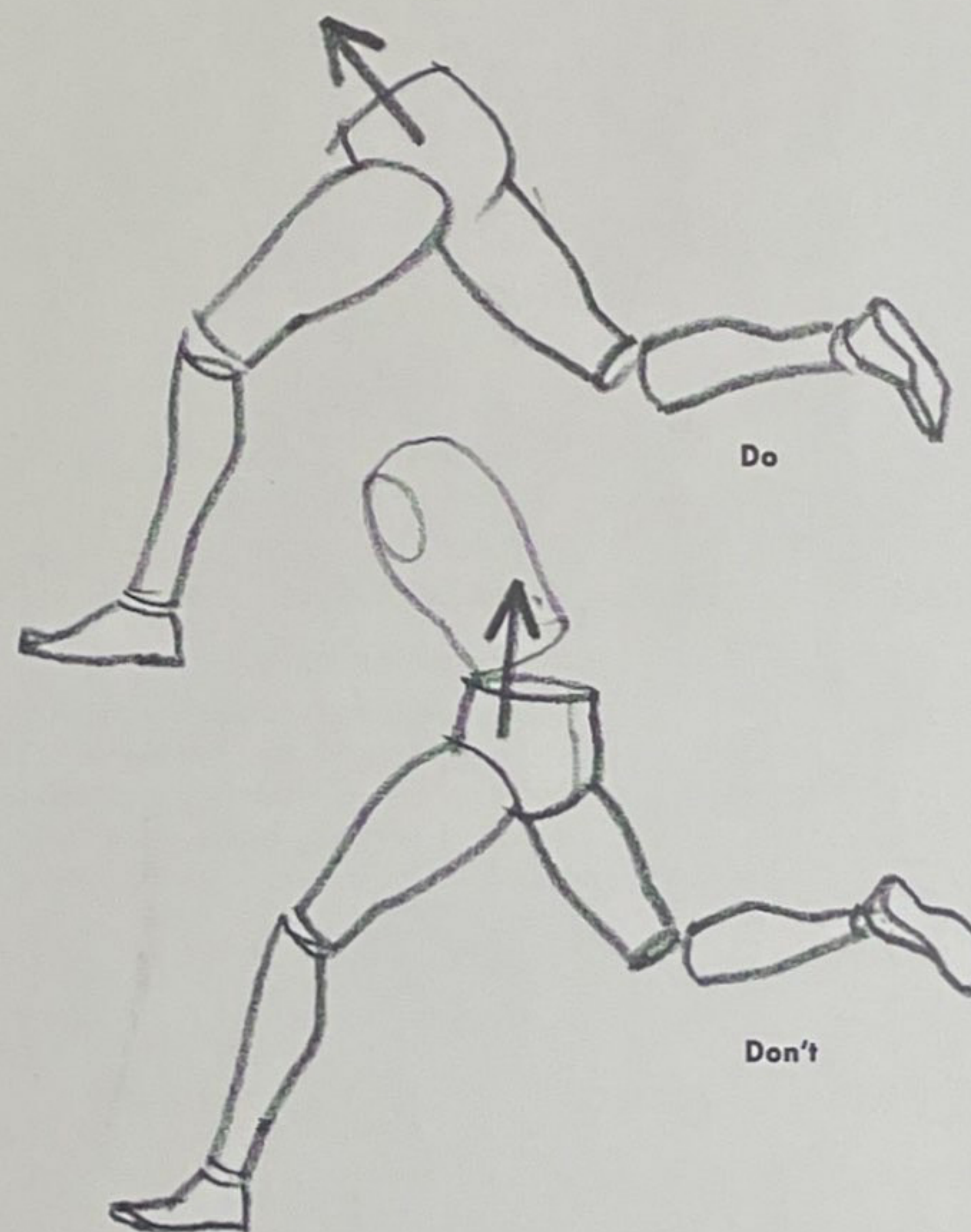
These two pages show you some of the typical errors to avoid in drawing the figure. Study these examples carefully and apply what you learn from them to each figure drawing you do.



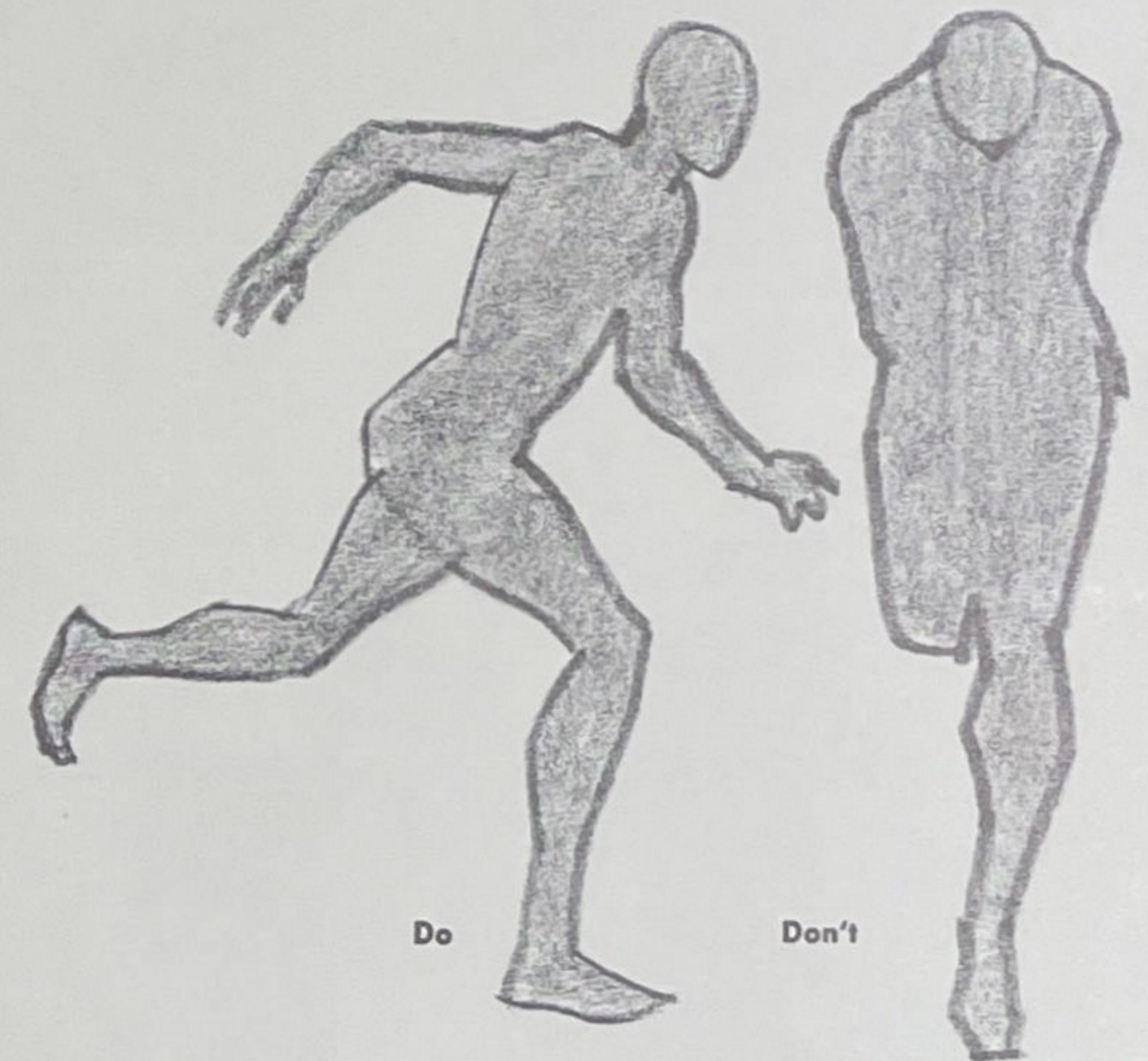
Remember the reciprocal action of the arms and legs. When a leg moves forward the arm on that side moves back.



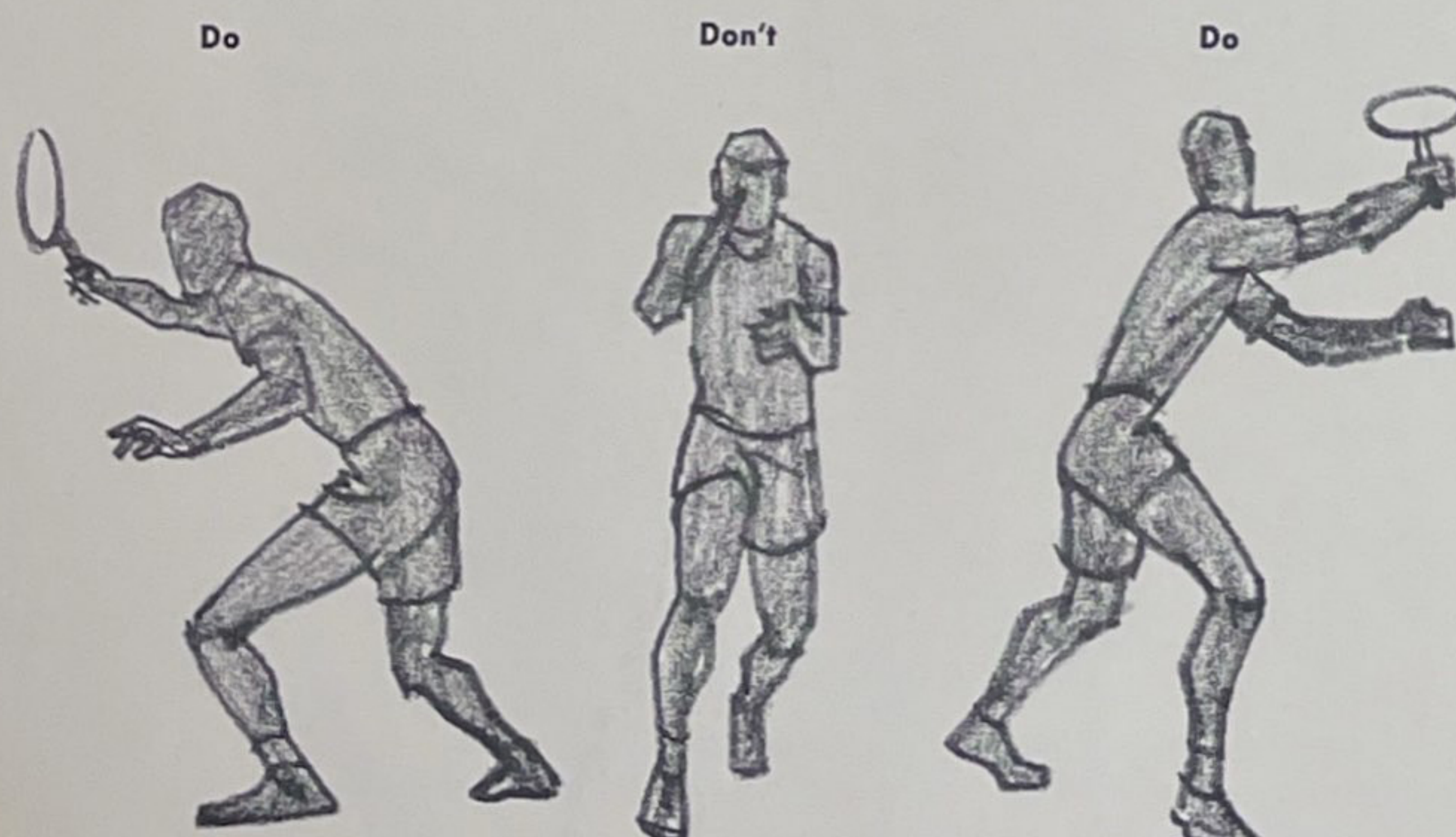
Be sure that your figure drawings are always in balance unless you specifically want to show a figure in an out-of-balance position such as falling, leaning, etc. In this case the body must be under the weight in order to support it convincingly.



Remember that the whole body is involved in the running action. The pelvis tilts forward in the direction of the run. Don't draw the pelvis completely vertical, as if the figure were standing.



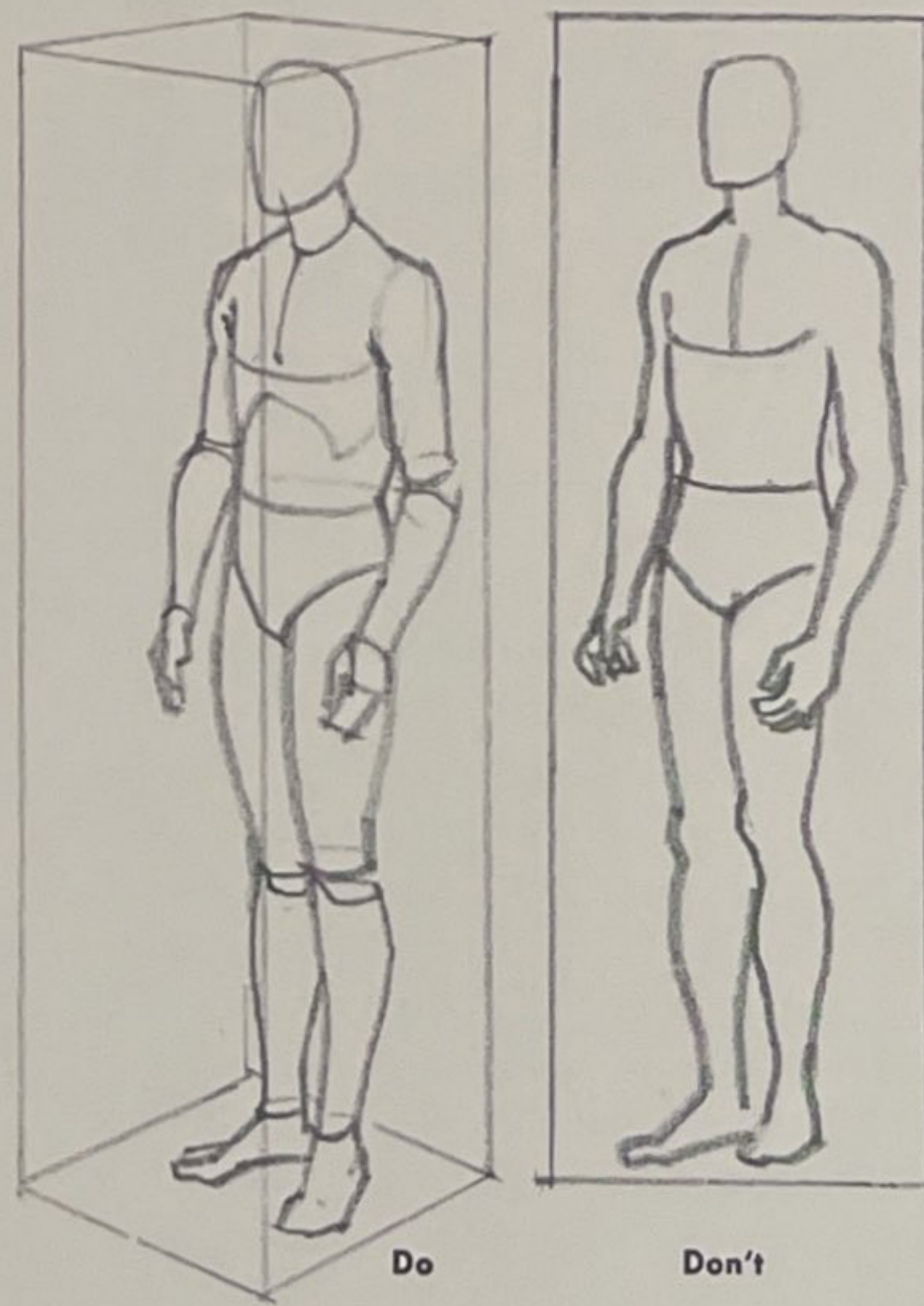
Don't draw the figure from an angle in which the action is confusing. Instead, choose a view which clearly describes the action.



In drawing an action, select a view that suggests movement rather than one that looks frozen. The start or finish of a tennis swing is more lively and descriptive than a phase between both poses.



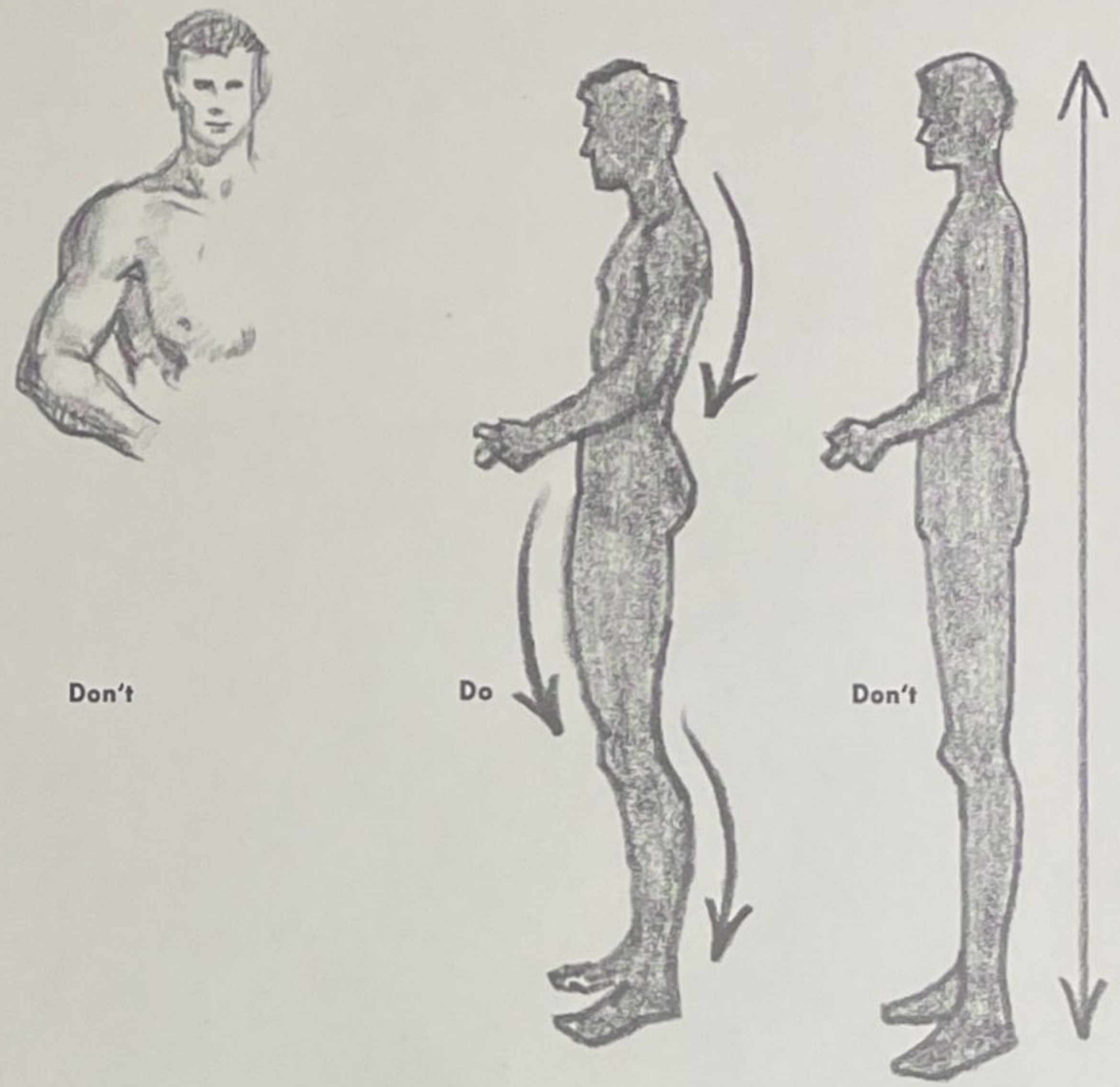
Don't fall into a few set ways of drawing figures in such positions as sitting, bending, kneeling. Observe the variety of positions that people assume and use them to add interest to your drawings.



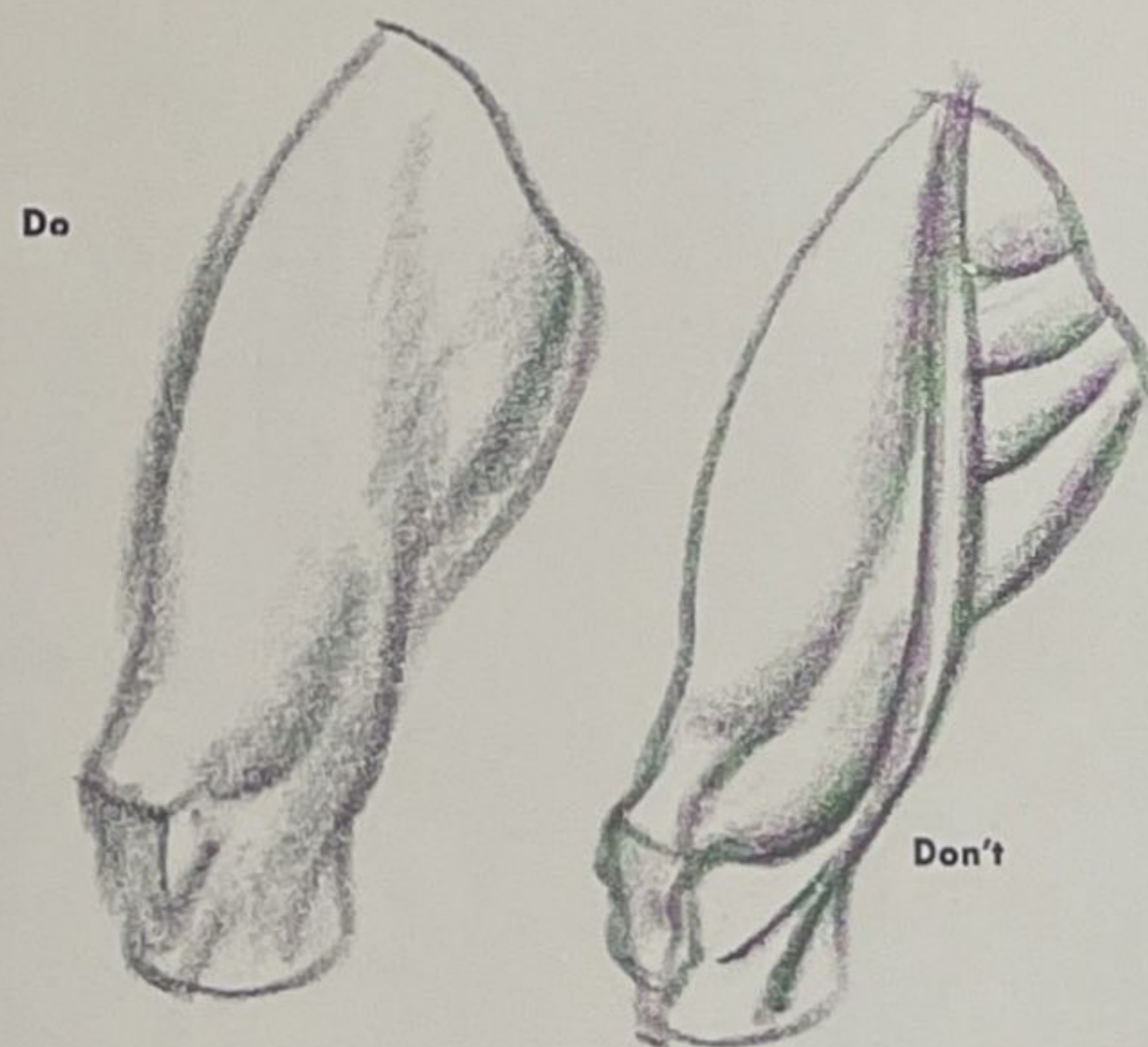
As you draw, remember that the whole figure is a solid form that occupies space. Unless you keep this in mind your drawing will appear flat and formless.



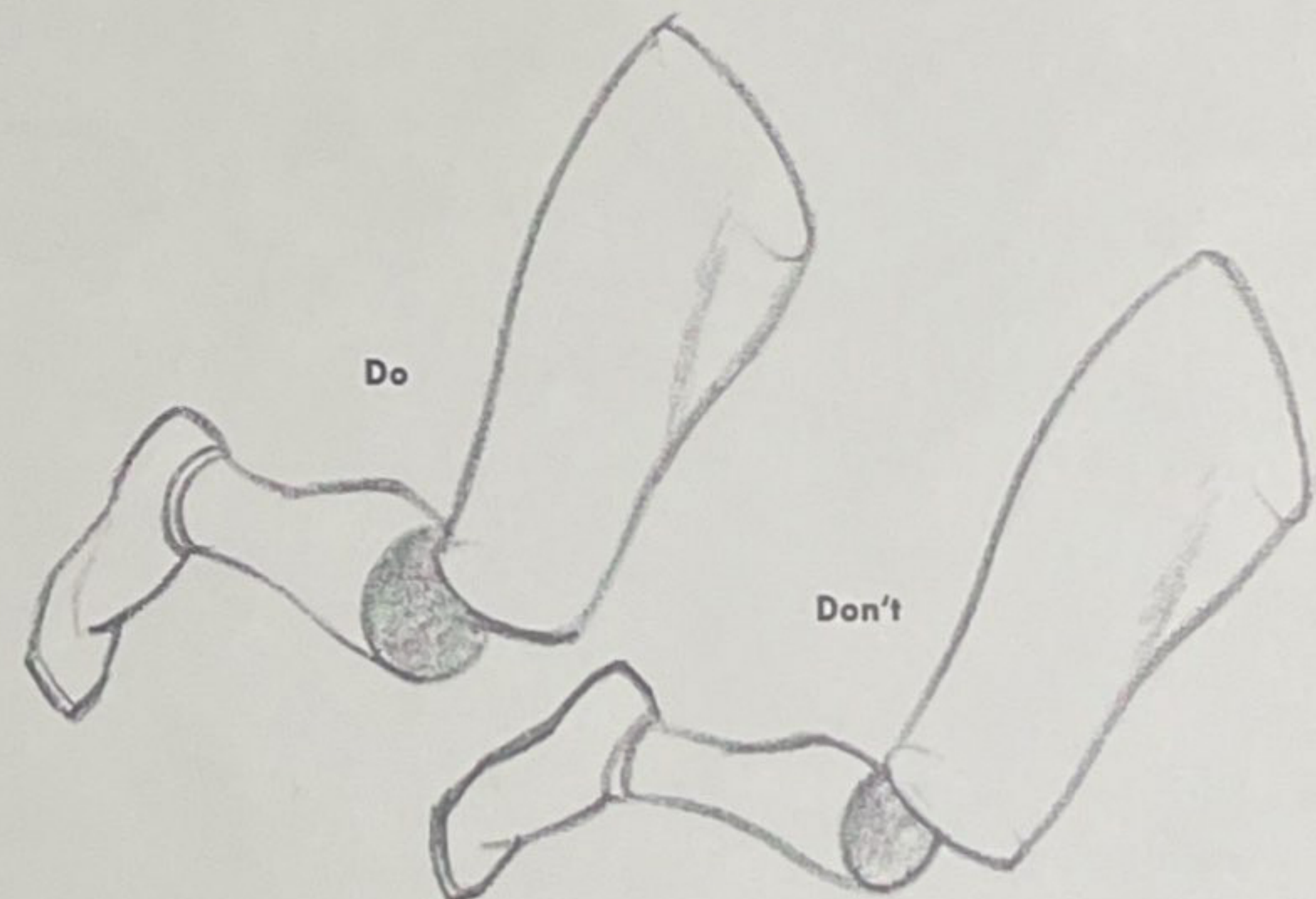
Indicate the main lines of the entire figure with your first few pencil lines. Don't try to finish one part without first relating it to the rest of the figure.



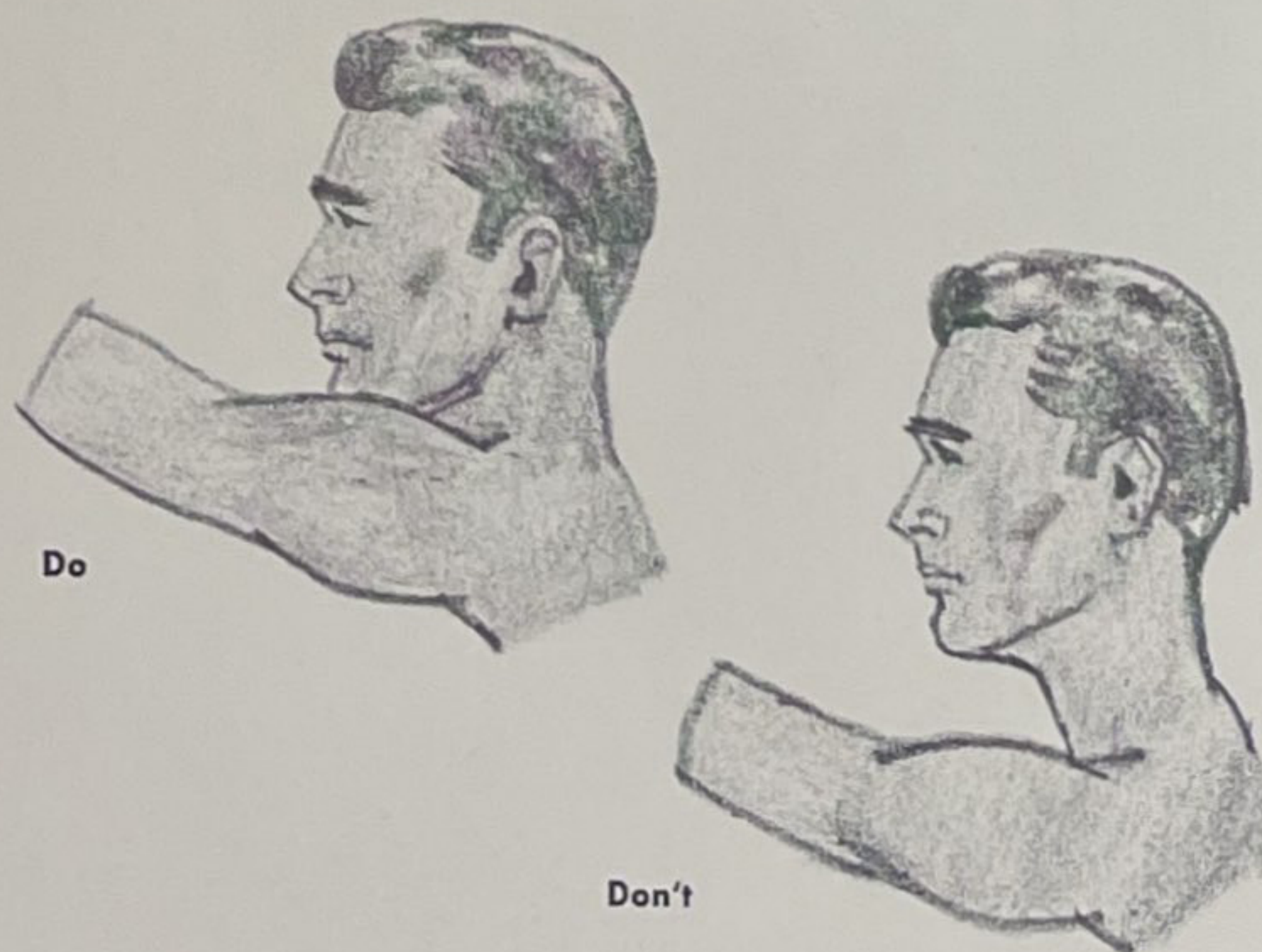
Look for the flow of alternating curves which runs through the body. These curves give it grace and a lifelike quality. Without these curves, the figure will look stiff and wooden.



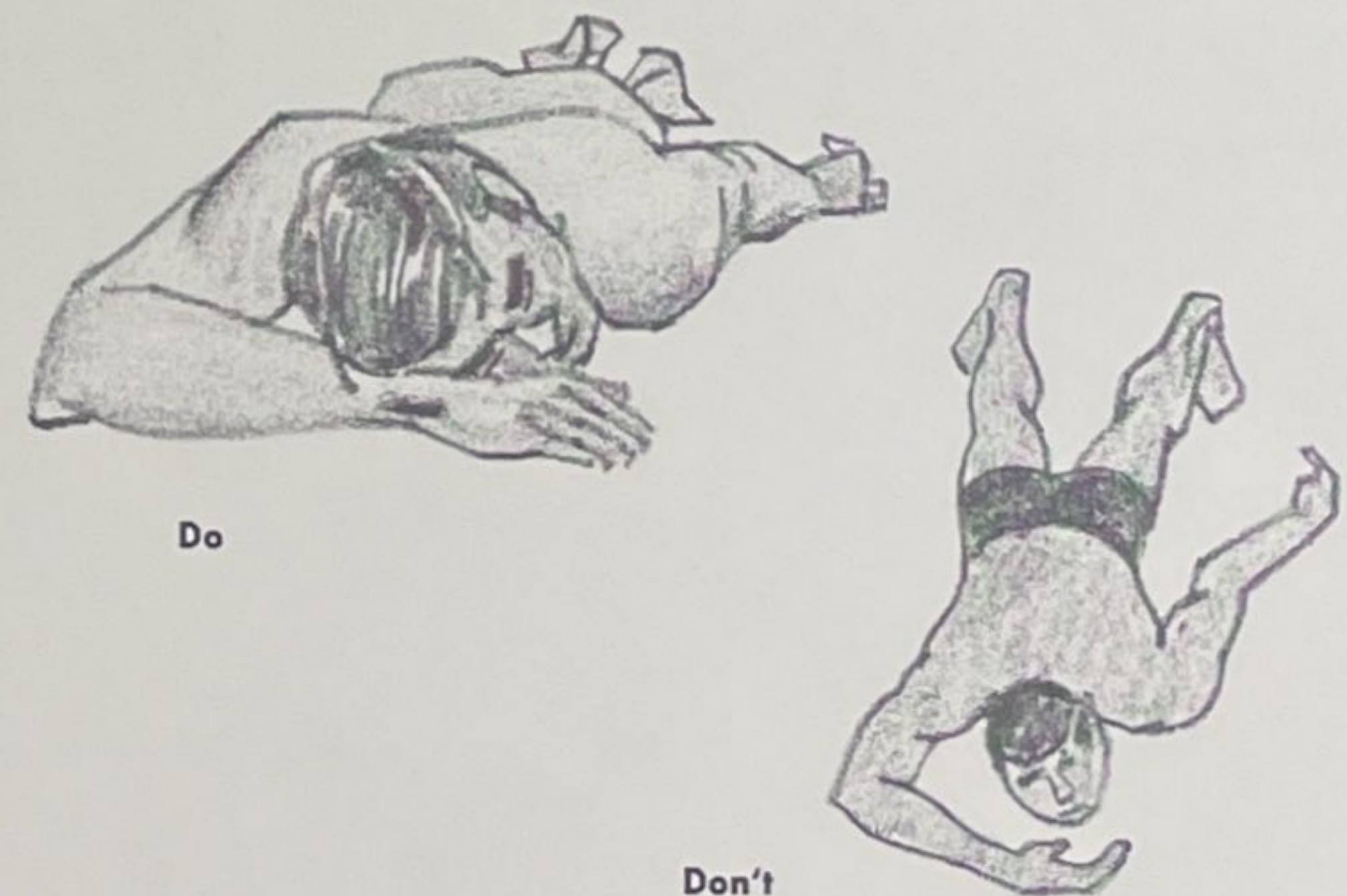
Always remember that each part of the body is first of all a solid form. Don't let your desire to show off anatomical knowledge cause you to draw a medical chart instead of a real figure.



In drawing foreshortened legs or arms, pay careful attention to the width. The length of the foreshortened part will be sharply reduced from the normal view but the width will remain the same.



Be especially observant when drawing the shoulder in action. Watch the deltoid or shoulder muscle — note it often hides the chin and much of the neck when the arm is raised above a horizontal level.



When faced with a problem in extreme foreshortening, draw what you see with confidence. Don't try to show all the parts which you would normally see. Much of the figure may be hidden.

"Movement" in repose

Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art



DEGAS. Two Dancers

Degas painted many pictures of dancers performing their art, but in most of his work he preferred to portray them off guard — in classrooms, relaxing from their work, off stage. His paintings are living proof that a figure need not be in violent action to give the viewer a feeling of movement.

Throughout this section we have been studying the physical gesture of the human figure in action. All action need not be extreme. Restrained gestures and movements can be full of rhythms and convey a convincing feeling of motion. In the examples on this and the following page, see how Degas used the human figure to create rhythms and patterns which give a feeling of motion to his paintings, even though his dancers are not actually dancing.

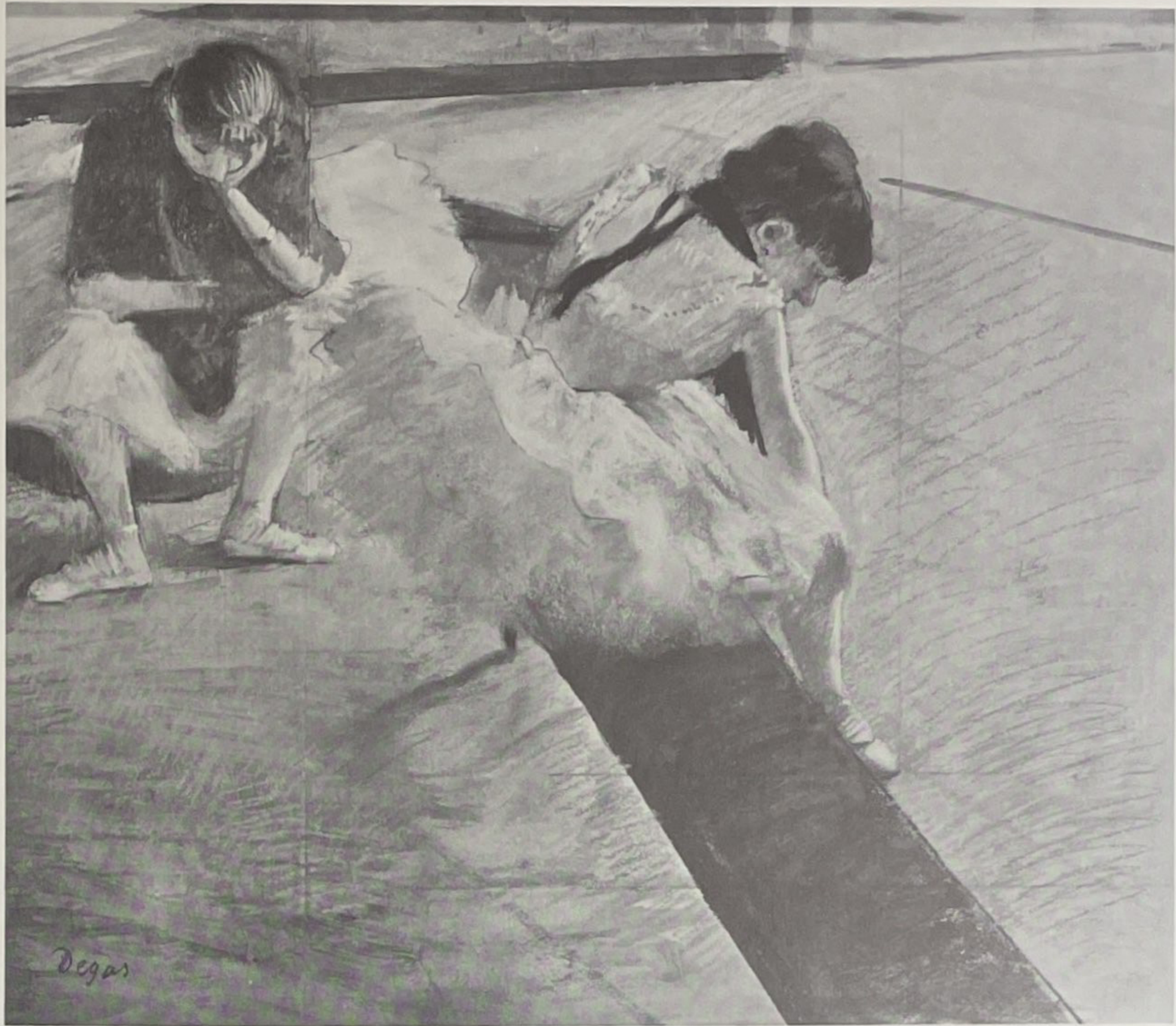
Degas' intimate, between-the-acts glimpses of dancers intent upon their work demonstrate how important *observation* is in portraying any action. A dancer takes advantage of every minute. Even when she is relaxing she almost subconsciously "turns out" her thighs, stretches her instep, or pulls back her shoulders. Degas' observation has seized upon all these characteristics. That is why his pictures are full of movement, grace and beauty, even though the dancers may, in fact, be still.

Whether you are painting dancers, ball players or stevedores, don't settle for the first obvious pose which comes to mind. Study your subject carefully, both "on stage" and "off stage." You may find, as Degas did, that the most expressive movements occur "off stage." The success of your paintings of the figure in motion will depend on how well you have observed the special movements which characterize your model — what he does that is different from what any other person does.



DEGAS. Two Dancers

Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art



DEGAS. Dancers at Rest

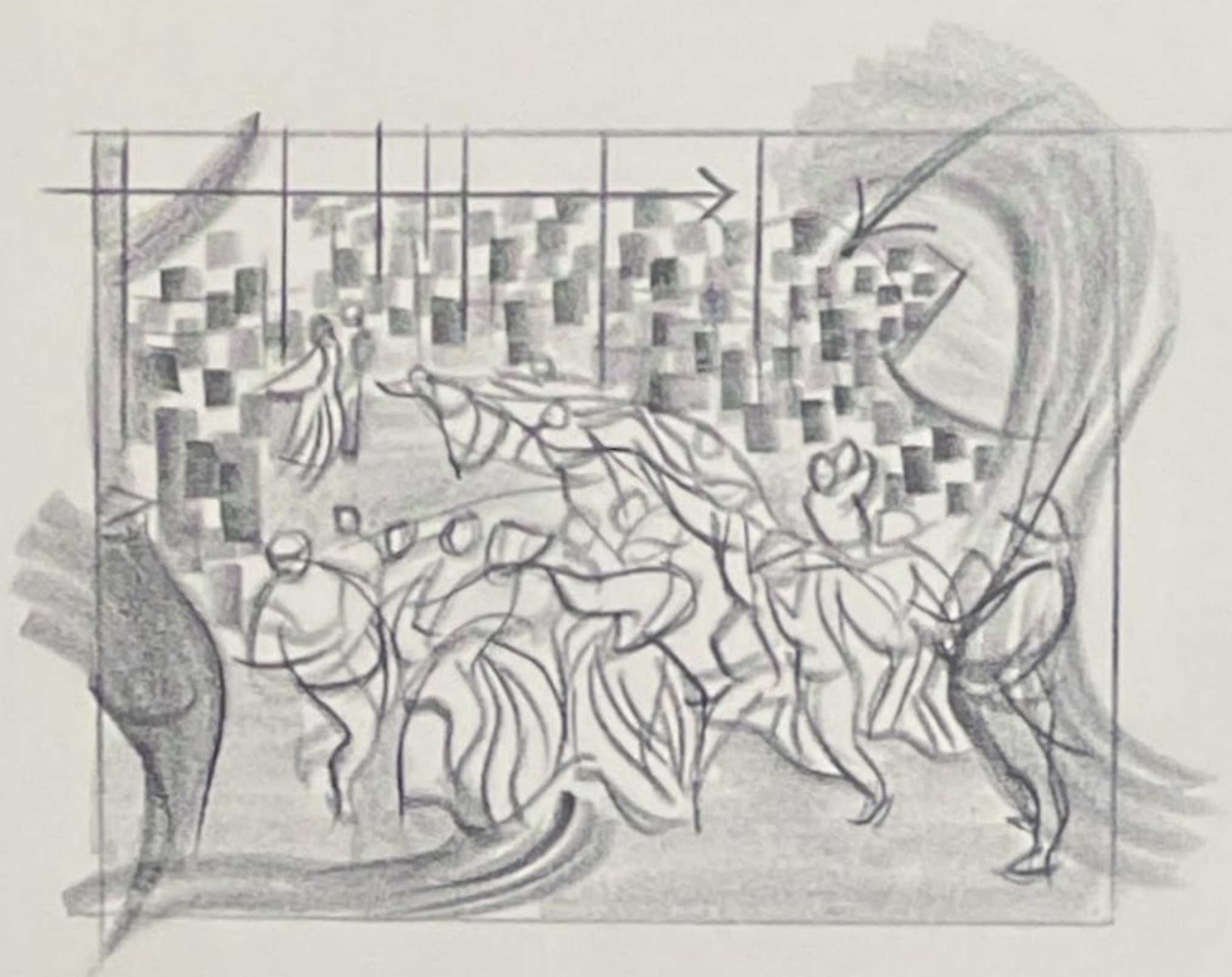
Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art



DEGAS. Three Dancers at Their Toilet

PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER
The Wedding Dance
The Detroit Institute of Arts



In his rollicking, *The Wedding Dance*, Pieter Bruegel conveyed movement both by skillful drawing of individual figures and by color composition. Using a slightly elevated view, he was able to stress the changing movements of the dancers and show the shift of weight from one foot to another. A continuous spiralling movement links figures in a chain through swirling garments in sharply contrasting local colors: a dark sleeve reaches back against a light apron; a light arm extends across a dark tunic. The animation of alternate lights and darks, warms and cools, expresses the lively tempo of the dance.